



ੴ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹ ॥



# The Sikh Faith

Questions & **Answers**



Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh

DHARAM PARCHAR COMMITTEE  
(SHIROMANI GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE)  
AMRITSAR.



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# The Sikh Faith

## *Questions & Answers*



BY  
Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh

Published By :  
**DHARAM PARCHAR COMMITTEE**  
(SHIROMANI GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE)  
AMRITSAR.

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*BY*

**Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh**

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**DEDICATED**  
TO  
THE YOUTH

ON WHOSE SHOULDERS LIES THE  
RESPONSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING  
EVER LASTING PEACE, TRUTH AND  
JUSTICE IN THE WORLD.

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## **PRELUDE TO THE SIKH PRAYER**

*Lord, You are our Master, we pray to You.*

*By Your grace were given soul, and body, too.*

*We are Your children. Father and Mother are You.*

*All peace we enjoy, You bestow.*

*How great You are no one can know.*

*The whole creation listens and obeys Your command.*

*Whatever is created abides by Your hand.*

*Your greatness is known only to You.*

*Nanak, Your pupil, sacrifices his all to You.*

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## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

Born in the village of, Gill Distt. Ludhiana Punjab on September 15th 1927, Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh studied at Lyallpur and Khalsa College, Amritsar. He obtained his Ph. D. degree from Ohio State University U.S.A. in 1963 and served as a Professor and Dean at Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana.

Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh was also fortunate to be in the company of Sant Teja Singh Mastuana (M.A., LL.B., A.M. Harvard University) for many years, who inspired him to study Sikh religion and preach Sikhism to the youth of North America. He resigned in 1984 and since then he has been very active, teaching Sikh religion to our youth.

Professor Gurbakhsh Singh is a very devoted Gursikh to the cause of Guru Khalsa Panth, and his scholarly lectures on Sikhism have tremendous effect on the minds of youth. Needless to say, Sikh youth love listening to him.

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# List of Questions

## *Chapter I*

*page 3*

- 1. Who created God? Our religion may be pretty clear but how do we know that God really exists? How did God create this universe and from where did He bring the matter?*
- Scientists have a theory that planets were created by an explosion in space. Humans and organisms were born from amino acids. I don't understand why other religions and even the Sikhs believe in God. What I mean is, "What is God? Is God a man, a woman, an animal, or what? How were any religions even started?"*
- When God made this world, why is there evil? God controls everything and people can't do anything then why do people lecture (preach) that we should try to improve ourselves?*
- Even if we try to do bad things why can't God stop us from doing it when everything is in His hands?*
- 2. Even if there is God why should people worship Him?*
- 3. God has no shape, form, or body. If nobody can describe God, how could the Gurus do that?*
- 4. How did God create the first man, woman, or the first person?*

## *Chapter II*

*page 35*

- 1. Sikhism, you said, is the faith of the modern age. How long would it take to be that from what it is now? If our religion is so great, then why do people ask me, "What is*

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*your religion?" and say, "I have never heard of that religion before."*

2. *In RehrasChaupai, it is said, "(God), protect me by your hand and destroy all my enemies." In Ardas, we pray for the welfare of whole humanity, "Sarbat Ka Bhala". Does the word Sarbat exclude our enemies? ਹਮਰੀ ਕਰੇ ਹਾਥ ਦੈ ਰੱਛਾ ... ਹਮਰੇ ਦੁਸ਼ਟ ਸਭੈ ਤੁਮ ਘਾਵਹੁ ॥ ਆਪ ਹਾਥ ਦੇ ਮੋਹਿ ਬਚਾਵਹੁ ॥*
3. *In Chopai it says anyone who remembers God for a moment will be saved from the noose of death. Then why have Sikh soldiers, who remembered God, died?*
4. *When we went to Gurdwaras in the cities, A and B (actual names withheld) they had Christmas decorations hung up. Why? Is it because Sikhs also have faith in Jesus? Why do Sikhs in some Gurdwaras celebrate New Year's Eve? It is related to the Christian calendar and not to the Sikh calendar, (Baisakhi).*
5. *Is it against our religion to have a drink of alcohol or is it bad only if you over drink and get drunk?*
6. *Do you think the Sikh religion has helped the world the way that Guru Nanak Dev Ji supposed it would?*
7. *What is the purpose of repeating Paath over and over again if you don't understand it?*
  - *Is Nam Simran (saying Waheguru repeatedly) more important than reading Gurbani? Which one is more useful in our life and why?*
8. *In some Gutkas, why are the Banis and Ardas longer than normal?*
9. *Is the dead body of a Sikh to be cremated or buried? What happens to it?*



10. *If we believe in reincarnation, were the Gurus reborn? How do we know people have a previous life form?*
11. *What is the Sikhs' version of Heaven and Hell?*
12. *If a person does something good or bad in this life, why does God wait to punish or reward him in his next life?*

*Chapter III*

*page 67*

1. *Guru Gobind Singh gave one Amrit. Now, we have so many Amrits Akal Takhat Amrit, Sant Amrit, Jatha Amrit, etc. Why is there such a conflict about what an Amritdhari should do or should not do?*
  - *Some say it is okay to eat meat while others say it is totally wrong. Some say all meats are okay except beef.*
  - *If a lady takes Amrit she must tie a turban. Why?*
2. *If a Sikh took Amrit and lied later, is he a Khalsa or not?*
3. *How are Amritdharis different from those Sikhs who live by Guru Granth Sahib, but do not wear the 5 symbols? How are they different from those people who serve humanity as a Khalsa is supposed to do?*
  - *Who is a better Sikh: he who is an Amritdhari, keeps 5 symbols and reads all Paath regularly, but does not live honestly; OR he who is not Amritshak, not wearing the 5 symbols, but lives a truthful life as a Sikh is supposed to live?*
  - *Why do people become Amritshak even though they know they are not going to go on the right path? I see people doing wrong things while they are Amritdhari Sikhs.*
4. *Why is a nonAmritdhari considered inferior to an Amritdhari (not allowed to eat from the same plate) when you say that we are all equal?*

- 
5. *Is it acceptable for a girl to shave her legs and underarms if she does not cut the hair on her head?*
  6. *Why do we have to have long hair? My dad said, "When the Sikhs were living in the forests, they could not get their hair cut, but now you can do it." Why can't we?*
  7. *How do we answer this question, "If you keep long hair, being God-given, why cut your nails which are also God-given?"*
  8. *You told us that keeping uncut hair is an essential requirement for a Sikh. Then why do Sikhs advertise "Wanted a clean-shaven Sikh" in matrimonial columns?*
  9. *What are the five symbols for?*
  10. *Why is the Kara (bracelet) not of silver or gold?*
  11. *If you do Amritshak, can ladies wear earrings, makeup, and other jewelry?*
  12. *Can a person who is not an Amritdhari Sikh be as brave and true as an Amritdhari Sikh?*
  13. *Should you put your kirpan over or under your shirt?*
  14. *Do Sikhs celebrate Diwali?*
    - *Is tying a "Rakhri" or "Rakhi" a Sikh ritual? Why or why not?*
  15. *My mom says you should not wash your hair on Fridays. Why not?*
  16. *Why do boys wear "pugree"? Why can't they keep their hair hanging down like English people? Also, male Sikhs tie turbans; why not female Sikhs?*

- 17. You ask us (girls) to keep our heads fully covered with scarf, but why men don't cover their beards in the Gurdwaras?**
- We cover our heads in Gurdwaras, I know it is out of respect. Is God not everywhere outside?**

**Chapter IV**

**page 98**

- 1. Who made Guru Nanak Dev a Guru? Or how did Guru Nanak find out he was a Guru?**
  - Why does not someone like Guru Nanak come to earth in this time to stop wickedness, thefts, liars, etc.?**
- 2. If the ten Gurus were supposed to lead us to a very happy life, why did they lead us through so much destruction and death?**
- 3. Why did Guru Gobind Singh have more than one wife? How many marriages did Guru Gobind Singh have?**
- 4. Who built the Golden Temple and when?**
- 5. Where was the first Sikh temple built? And in North America?**
- 6. Does it really matter whether the Sakhis are true or not? They teach us how to be good Sikhs which is what matters.**
- 7. Who made the Panjabi writings first?**
- 8. Are the pictures of the Gurus real? If not, then why do we hang them?**
  - If the Guru let somebody paint a picture of him, are you allowed to bow or to pray to it? Is it considered all right to have the pictures of Gurus if you don't worship them?**

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9. *Can we make movies with the Gurus as actors as Hindus do with gods?*

**Chapter V**

**page 118**

1. *Why do we have to take off our shoes when we go into Baba ji's room or Gurdwara when Christians don't, even though they too have their holy Bible placed in their church?*
2. *Why do we keep a moneybox before the Guru Granth Sahib? Is God greedy?*
  - *Where does that money go?*
3. *Why do men and women sit separately? Why is the stage always on the right side (the side of the men)?*
  - *Why do we sit on the floor? It is hard for the people with back pains. In the Gurdwara, why is it bad for a person to sit against the wall?*
4. *Why do we have to do Ardas? (At the end of the function, just read Gurbani in the holy book).*
  - *Why do we stand up for performing Ardas?*
5. *Why isn't there a woman Granthi?*
6. *Why insist on suits for girls (no naked legs), when boys are allowed to wear shorts in the Gurdwara?*
7. *Why do we do matha tek ( bow to touch the ground with our forehead) to the holy Sikh Bible (Guru Granth Sahib)? Is it not idol worship?*
8. *Why do we do Chaur on the Guru Granth Sahib? Why do we put the Granth Sahib on a bed? Why the Chanani or canopy?*

9. *What is the difference between getting a name picked by the Guru Granth Sahib and by your parents? Are there any advantages in either way?*
10. *Why do we give out 'Parshad'? I feel guilty when I don't take it, but I don't like it because of its sugar and oily content.*
11. *Why do we put kirpan in Karah Parshad?*
  - *Why do we serve Parshad to Panj Pyaras first when all are equal? Why is a small pot of Parshad kept under the Guru Granth Sahib?*
12. *Does Langar always have to be Indian foods?*
13. *Those who serve Langar bend constantly. It is hard to do that. They step on things, spilling food on the floor. Wouldn't it be easier to sit at tables?*
14. *When Sikhs are allowed to eat meat, why is it not served in Langar? Is it because we "feed" Langar to the Guru Granth Sahib.*
  - *Are Sikhs supposed to be vegetarian or not? Is it mentioned anywhere in the Guru Granth Sahib? Why do some Sikhs kill animals to eat them? Animals are things who deserve to live like us.*

*Chapter VI*

*page 139*

1. *Is it necessary to partake of Amrit? If we do not, who are we, Khalsa or what?*
2. *Is it necessary for a Sikh to take Amrit? If we don't take Amrit can we still be considered close to the Guru Ji?*
3. *What is the next step after you partake of Amrit?*



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4. *I am very unsure of why growing hair is a must for a Sikh. Is there any special motive behind it or is it an order?*
    - *Is it a breach of faith to have short hair?*
    - *What part do the five Kakaars play in our life?*
  5. *During social parties and celebrations, is drinking alcohol in small amounts allowed?*
  6. *Can an Amritdhari, (i)wear earrings, (ii)eat meat?*
    - *Why don't we do the full Rehras at the Samelan (Johor Bahru, Malaysia, 1994 meet)?*
  7. *"Reht pyari mujh ko, sikh pyara nah". What does it mean?*
  8. *Guru Nanak said to the Brahman, "Will this thread make me a better person?" I ask now about the 5k's "Will they make me a better person?"*
  9. *In which line in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is it written that we must wear six to seven yards of turban?*
  10. *"A man with a bottle in hand might be better than another with a Bible in his hand" I express that inner sincerity is much more important than external hypocrisy.*
  11. *How can you make someone who smokes and drinks to stop and take Amrit?*
  12. *What do you mean by "Raj Karega Khalsa Aki Reheh Na Koi"? Who is going to do Raj?*
  13. *Why do weapons play an important role in our religion? Is it not an act against peace?*
    - *What does the Khanda mean?*

- 1. How did Guru Nanak manage to form the Sikh Religion when Islam was the top religion in the world at that time?**
- 2. Is not Sikhism just another religion? Don't all religions preach the path to God?**
  - Why did Guru Teg Bahadur sacrifice his life for the Hindus, when Sikhism does not encourage the practice of Hindu rituals?**
- 3. How can I see any of the Gurus? How can the Gurus come down to meet us here?**
- 4. I have heard and read there are other Masters/Gurus who can help us to reach liberation/mukti. These people have experienced God and by following them, one may experience God, too. These people may be Sikhs (sants) or from other religions. Is this true? If so, are we as Sikhs allowed to follow these people?**
- 5. Why do most temples celebrate only Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh's birthday and not of the rest of the Gurus. Are not they all equal?**
- 6. We take out Parsad in the name of the Panj Pyaras. Similarly, why do we not take out Parsad in the name of the ten Gurus as well?**
- 7. I have been an Amritdhari for the past 8 years, I do my Banis regularly, but the confusion I face is how am I going to be united with the Satguru?**
- 8. What does Guru Granth Sahib tell about Yoga?**

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9. *In Christianity they say Jesus Christ is the only saviour. You say Guru Nanak is the only saviour. What is the difference?*

*Chapter VIII*

*page 185*

*Question A: I have read the Christian Bible and have found that so many teachings of Jesus are similar to that in the Guru Granth Sahib. So, is Christianity a "partner" religion with Sikhism since both speak the same message? If so, why is there so much friction between our faiths?*

*Question B: An increasing number of Sikhs feel that Guru Nanak's teachings should be adopted as they deal with peace. Guru Gobind Singh has portrayed the teachings of violence and not peace.*

*How are we to convince these Sikhs that there is no difference in both the teachings?*

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

## **First Edition**

All young persons who showed great interest in the Sikh Faith and asked challenging questions during the Sikh youth camps deserve the sincere thanks of the author. Thanks are also due to those who desired the publication of these questions and answers in the form of a book for the information of the Sikh youth and their parents.

Balpreet Kaur Sandhu of Fredericksburg, Virginia, a seventh grade student, deserves the credit for typing these answers. The draft answers were sent to some young Sikhs for corrections and comments. The author is obliged to Taranjeet Singh, Richmond, B.C.; Amanjit Kaur, Burnaby, B.C.; Kirpaul Kaur, Vancouver, B.C.; Paramjit Singh, Vancouver, Canada; Ronjeet Lal, Arlington, Texas; and many others for valuable suggestions. The corrected version was sent to Sikh scholars in North America. The author is especially indebted to Sardar Kuldip Singh, Toledo, Ohio and Sardar Ujagar Singh, White Plains, New York for their contributions. The author is also indebted to Mrs. Hermeet Kaur Dhillon Singh, Arlington, Virginia. She was very generous in editing the book.

Dr. Harbans Lal, Sardar Kirpal Singh and Sardar Harbhajan Singh, Dallas, Texas took great

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pains to finalize and typeset the manuscript. The author appreciates all those who helped in publishing and distributing this book, making it available to the readers.

## **Second Edition**

The author is thankful to the patrons of the first edition for accepting it as useful to youth and adults alike. It was reprinted by:

1. Guru Gobind Singh Study circle, Model Town Extension, Ludhiana, Panjab, India. (Panjabi and Hindi versions were also printed.)

2 Sikh Naujwan Sabha, Malaysia.

3 Delhi Gurdwara Management committee, India.

4 Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, Singapore.

In light of the suggestions and opinions received from the readers, Part I of the book has been revised. The author is thankful to all of the readers who sent him their comments and observations. Some new questions have also been added.

During November-December, 1994 the author was invited by Sikh Naujwan Sabha, Malaysia, for their annual youth *Samelan* (camp) at Johar Bahru. He also attended the Singapore Sikh youth *Samelan*



in December. The participants asked very interesting and challenging questions concerning their life in the East. Sikh Naujwan Sabha, who were planning another reprint of the book, wanted the answers to those questions to be included in that edition. Motivated by their enthusiasm and the interest of the youth in Malaysia and Singapore, the author gave them written answers to the questions asked at the camps. Before leaving Kuala Lumpur, the author was given a typed copy of the answers by the volunteers of the Sabha. At Vancouver, the revised draft was corrected and later typed by two youths, Jasjit Singh and Baldeesh Singh. The new questions from the East have been included as Part II of the book.

Gurmeet Kaur of U.B.C., Vancouver read the second edition. She made very useful remarks for improving the draft in light of which changes were made again. Mrs. Judith Bali of Guelph, Ontario, edited the manuscript and made many critical observations. Taranjeet Singh, Richmond, B.C. kindly agreed to prepare the final copy for printing.

The author is indebted to all persons who contributed to the completion of this work and for making this book available to the youth.

Gurbakhsh Singh

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## Foreword

During the Sikh youth camps held in North America for the past 15 years, we have been bombarded with multitudes of questions about our religion. The Sikh Faith for Youth in the form of questions and answers is the need of the hour as it took care of all of the questions raised by the youth in a systematic manner. The author, Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh, has done a wonderful job in answering all these questions in the light of *Gurbani* and *Sikh Reht Maryada*.

Sikhism, ever since its existence, has been under constant threat of being absorbed back into the Hindu fold by those who never wanted Sikhs to exist as a separate entity. Sikh Gurus effectively eradicated the caste system which made the foundation of the fabric of Brahmanical society for centuries. Many religious and political analysts have warned us from time to time about the hostility of the Hindu majority community towards others in India, but the chapters of the books which give the details of all the analyses are lying somewhere in the libraries or national archives, and most Sikhs do not even know that such material exists.

As early as 1899, Max Arthur MacCauliffe, in the preface of his book, *The Sikh Religion*, has very rightfully remarked, "*A movement to declare the Sikhs as Hindus in direct opposition to the teachings of the Gurus is wide spread and of long duration.*"

In 1911, Mr. D. Petrie of the Criminal Intelligence, British Government of India, in his report on the development of Sikh politics indicated, "*The activities*

*of Hindus have, therefore, been constantly directed to the undermining of Sikhism both by preventing the children of Sikh fathers from taking Pahul (Amrit) and by reducing professed Sikhs from their allegiance to their faiths. Hinduism has strangled Buddhism, once a formidable rival to it, and it has made serious inroads into the domain of Sikhism".*

Therefore Sikh youth, on whose shoulders lies the major responsibility of maintaining Sikhism in its original form, must have a proper understanding of their religion. This book will act as a catalyst to develop incentive in the Sikh youth to study the vast amount of Sikh literature and get intellectually armed to face those who are out to destroy the religious life of the Sikhs and others in North America.

June 1, 1990  
Kuldip Singh  
Ujagar Singh

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# INTRODUCTION

This book has been prepared in response to a deeply felt need of Sikh youth to know about their faith and practices. Sikh children who live in North America are confronted daily with what they perceive to be a set of unjustifiable and unresolved contradictions. These confrontations arise both from within and from outside. When Sikh youth interact with other youth raised in western cultures and beliefs, they are obligated to explain many beliefs and practices of their Indian-born parents. Curiosity about their faith arises naturally, because their living styles and cultural practices often differ from those of their peers. Another factor that promotes questioning about their beliefs is the nature of contemporary education of Sikh youth. In their schools, young Sikhs are given westernized education, which is most modern in its scope and methodology. It is a western tradition to inculcate in the young mind the skills of reasoning and the attitudes of seeking factual information. They are encouraged not to shy away from asking challenging questions.

**Traditional questions:** It is obvious that Sikh youth develop a lot of curiosity and questions about every aspect of their life in which belief in the religion of their parents ranks high. However, there is little effort by our traditional institutions to provide answers to their inquiries. As a result, it is feared that they may rebel against their religion. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Sikh youth but is being observed in every commu-

nity today. To leave the young mind in a state of doubt is a dangerous precedent. Community leaders are increasingly alarmed over the growing indifference of youth towards religion. Talking of Christianity, Tom Harper, a Christian theologian of the *Toronto Star* observes in his book, *For Christ's Sake*:

Christianity may well be thriving in parts of Africa and Asia today, but in the West, Christian faith is eroding at an alarming rate. Secular humanism is fast becoming the prevailing "religion" of the Western world. For instance, it is no longer true to describe either Canada or England as a Christian country, since the vast majority of their respected populations have no traditional ties with any religious body (the Church of England alone has closed nine hundred churches since 1974). Add to this the fact that only a small fraction of children and young people now receive any religious instruction whatever, and the prognosis for the year 2000 looks very bleak indeed . . . but no amount of technical sophistication will avail unless the message itself makes sense.

The youth, not satisfied with the available sources of knowledge about their faith, feel torn between loyalty to tradition and a lack of understanding of the tradition. Confronted with these situations, some Sikh youth have already begun to question many of their beliefs and practices. This is not because they wish to discard these beliefs but often simply because they need the answers to increase their understanding and pride in their beliefs. They ask straight and honest questions. They seek answers from their preachers, their parents and their teachers. Some of these questions might have rarely occurred to their Indian-trained preachers and Indian-born parents. In Panjab, where practice of tradition is taken as a living fact, many of



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these questions may never be formulated. Thus parents and preachers alike are finding themselves without answers in many situations, and they themselves are beginning to seek sources of the necessary knowledge.

**Modern scholars' views:** Harper holds science and technology responsible for the indifference of youth towards the Christian faith. These two modern devils, science and technology, which are held "guilty" for "misguiding" the youth, however, may turn out to be *devtas* (gods) for promoting Sikh philosophy. The very science and technology which are blamed for eroding many foundations and pillars of the major religions seem to have inherent potential to promote faith in Sikh doctrines and explain that Sikhism (founded only five centuries ago) is the faith for the modern age. Many scholars both from the West and the East have felt this way about Sikhism. This is illustrated with some examples here.

"Sikhs must cease to think of their Faith as just another good religion but rather they must begin to think in terms of Sikhism being the religion of this New Age . . . **The Sikh religion is truly the answer to the problems of the modern man.**" Reverend Bradshaw in the Sikh Review, Calcutta, India.

"In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scriptures, the Adi Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world." Professor Toynbee in "The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs" published by UNESCO.

"There is something strangely modern about these scriptures (Guru Granth). They speak to a person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind." Pearl S. Buck, a Nobel Laureate. Preface

to the translation of *Adi Guru Granth Sahib* by Gopal Singh Dardi.

(See "Sikhism, A Universal Faith", pages 37-40, published by the Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society, P.O. Box 60153, 6417 Fraser St., Vancouver, B.C. V5W 4B5 Canada)

**Teaching Sikh Faith:** For a long time, there have been no systematic arrangements established to teach the Sikh youth about the basic principles of their faith and its suitability for the world of today. Neither could Sikh youth find any forum where they could collectively, without fear of their parent's objection, ask important questions regarding Sikh beliefs and practices (*Reht-Maryada*). They have been keeping their agony and frustrations to themselves without giving free vent to their feelings and without finding answers to their questions.

It is a practice in every Sikh household to take children to *Sadh Sangat* (holy congregations) where they join their parents in singing the holy hymns. In these gatherings Sikh youth are exposed to many traditions of Sikh religious practices. Most of those who do visit the Gurdwaras and participate in the religious functions do not enjoy them. Further, they remain unconvinced, hence uninterested, in the answers given to them by the traditional preachers who are usually not educated in the modern institutions. As a result, the Sikh youth pay little attention to what is said there, because often it does not meet the test of modern logic and is not based on factual reasoning.

**Sikh Youth Camps:** To respond to the intellectual inquiries of their children, various Sikh communities in North America started summer youth camps

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and weekend schools. There they teach their children the Sikh faith and its relevance to modern-day living. These retreats are beginning to encourage the Sikh youth to ask questions, and attempts are made to find answers to their questions.

This effort to provide some answers in the form of published communication started in 1986. The participants attending various youth camps were provided with opportunities to ask in writing any question without the fear of being considered wrong, disrespectful, or even silly. Disclosure of the name on the question sheet was not made obligatory so that one could choose to conceal one's identity. To encourage the youth to get genuinely interested in asking serious questions, a \$50 prize was announced at each camp for the best question asked.

At the youth camps in Canada and the USA, about 500 questions were received from the trainees. After eliminating duplications, the questions were grouped in sections to facilitate their reference. To retain the original spirit and tone of the questions and to convey the feelings of the youth to the readers, little editing was attempted. The answers were drafted in an attempt to provide information in simple and straight idioms. As far as possible, the jargon of mystic terminology was avoided. The typed version was sent to a number of friends for soliciting their critique and suggestions. Similarly, a number of youth leaders were asked to go through the draft and make suggestions.

The outcome of the above described efforts is being published in this book. It is hoped that the youth will be pleased with this effort and the reading of this

book will satisfy their curiosity to a great extent. They will be encouraged to ask more questions for the next edition of this book.

This book is being published and distributed with the help of the friends who care. The purpose of this book will be considered fulfilled if Sikh youth increase their pride in their faith as a result of browsing through it. The publishers will be amply rewarded if the readers take time to send their critiques and suggestions for future editions of this publication.

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# **PART I**

**ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS  
ASKED IN THE**

**WEST.**



## **Chapter I**

# **WAHEGURU (GOD)**

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- 1. Who created God? Our religion may be pretty clear but how do we know that God really exists? How did God create this universe and from where did He bring the matter?**
- Scientists have a theory that planets were created by an explosion in space. Humans and organisms were born from amino acids. I don't understand why other religions and even the Sikhs believe in God. What I mean is, "What is God? Is God a man, a woman, an animal, or what? How were any religions even started?"**
  - When God made this world, why is there evil? God controls everything and people can't do anything then why do people lecture (preach) that we should try to improve ourselves?**

- **Even if we try to do bad things why can't God stop us from doing it when everything is in His hands?**

All these questions are discussed under the following topics.

## **(A) WHAT IS WAHEGURU?**

This profound question in the mind of man will ever remain unanswered because we can only realize Waheguru but we cannot tell what He is. In *Gurbani*, there is a simple example to explain why no one can answer this question. A mute person, after tasting sugar, knows the taste, enjoys it and expresses it through a smile. But being unable to speak, he cannot tell a word about what sugar is like. Waheguru is love, hence immensely sweet, many times more sweet than anything in this world. Holy persons love Waheguru, they enjoy the sweetness but cannot say anything by which we can know and understand Waheguru. There is no language and no thing available in this world which can be quoted to describe Waheguru. Therefore, only similes, however incomplete or unrepresentative they may be, have been offered by holy persons. That is the best they can do to explain their mystic experiences of the spiritual world (Waheguru) to those living in this mundane world.



## **Waheguru as Father - Mother:**

(i) Waheguru is mentioned as Father, Mother, Protector, etc. These words are used to remind us about some of His virtues. Waheguru is the cause of our birth (creation). He nurses us, protects us, and does everything else to make our lives happy, the way parents do for their children.

Before creating humans and other living beings, Waheguru created the sun, moon, water, air, plants, etc. He also created whatever was required by the people to live comfortably. All things are a gift from Waheguru to us as children are given all things free with love by their parents. There are many other things that we have not yet discovered which have been created by Waheguru. The earth, sun, rain, air, darkness, etc. have been so adjusted that they produce innumerable kinds of foods for our consumption. No scientist with all the latest technology has ever been able to create a single grain or fruit in his laboratory. This is done by Waheguru alone under His own laws. These natural phenomena are so set that the earth produces different kinds of foods in different regions. Man is required only to put the Waheguru-given seeds in the soil and harvest the fruit.

Waheguru does many more things than those mentioned above to keep us comfortable and happy in the same way that parents do for their children. Hence the most popular character of Waheguru is revealed to our heart when with love we say, "You are my Father, my Mother, my Brother, and all my other kin.... You

protect me from everything at all places." *Gurbani* expresses it in these words:

ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਪਿਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਾਤਾ॥ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਬੰਧਪੁ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਭ੍ਰਾਤਾ॥  
ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਰਾਖਾ ਸਭਨੀ ਥਾਈ ਤਾ ਭਉ ਕੇਹਾ ਕਾੜਾ ਜੀਉ॥ Page 103

(ii) The mother, having a physical existence, is visible to her children. Waheguru also has a physical form and is visible to us as "Mother Nature", which is mentioned in *Gurbani* as below:

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ॥ ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਲਖਿਆ॥ Page 469

(iii) When we see a mother with a baby in her lap, we know that the baby and the mother were once one, i.e., the baby was a part of the mother. The same thing can be said about us and Waheguru. We have been created by Waheguru, we were part of Him. We are His children. We can enjoy the love of Waheguru and feel the peace as well as comfort in our heart in the same way as a baby does in the lap of its mother. However, it is impossible for a baby to describe the mother, understand how and when she was born, from where she gets food and other necessities, how she built the house, etc. After becoming an adult, the baby knows all about the answers to these questions and understands her well. In the same way, when we 'children' grow spiritually to be 'adults' we can understand our Mother, Waheguru. That is the only way to know Waheguru. As long as we are 'babies' we will not be able to know our 'Mother'.

To become an 'adult' means to know 'What am I?' Therefore, to answer the GREAT QUESTION -- WHAT IS WAHEGURU? -- the first step is to know,

'WHAT AM I? "I" is tangible to all of us, hence easily knowable. Waheguru is immanent and at the same time also transcendent, hence not visible and difficult to understand. "I", being a child of Waheguru, is a reflection of Waheguru. Once we 'grow' spiritually, we can understand "I" and we can then understand Waheguru.

### **Waheguru Resides in Mankind:**

(i) 'Today' I am old. 'Yesterday' I was young and proud of my health, looks, physical strength, political power, etc. The 'Day Before Yesterday', I was just a baby crying or sleeping most of the time, but a joy and a hope to My parents who are no longer here to look after Me. 'Tomorrow' I will be dead and buried or cremated. Nothing will be left of Me except My children who, in their turn, will also die. Their children will continue this cycle. No one can tell when this cycle began. Furthermore, no one can tell when this cycle will end, if it ever will.

Now you know 'MY' history. But can you tell who 'I' am or who 'I' was? Am 'I' a baby, a child, a young man, an old man, or nothing but dust, My final form? Maybe, 'I' was none of these; at the same time, maybe 'I' actually was. To answer this question, let us have a second look at what 'I' had been.

We thought 'I' was born, grew old, and died. Actually not 'I', but 'MY' body was born, it increased in size, grew old and finally died. When 'MY' body returned to the earth, its constituents, all of which came from the earth, became earth again. They were picked

up by the plants and trees to start another cycle. All through this cycle, everybody had the illusion that 'MY' body was 'I'.

If you ask now what 'I' was, the answer would be "All through this cycle 'I' was the "livingness," soul, or life in the body." 'MY' body, not 'I', underwent continuous changes in its form and size. 'I', (inside MY body) remained unchanged with the physical changes in my body. 'I' did not grow or become old or die. Neither could 'I' do anything to 'MY' body such as stop its growth or make it grow more quickly. For example, a person of fifteen years of age cannot become thirty years old in a couple of months, or a thirty-year old man remain the same forever without becoming old or dying. 'MY' body underwent all changes independent of 'ME' and 'MY' wishes. The birth, growth, and death of 'MY' body were controlled by nature according to the time cycle decided for 'ME' and 'MY' body. After the clock ran out, 'I' and 'MY' body became separated. This phenomenon is described by *Gurbani* like this:

ਧਨ ਕਰੈ ਤੂ ਵਸ ਮੈ ਨਾਲੇ॥ ਪਿਆ ਸੁਖਵਾਸੀ ਬਾਲ ਗੋਪਾਲੇ॥  
ਤੁਝੈ ਬਿਨਾ ਹਉ ਕਿਤਹੀ ਨ ਲੇਖੈ ਵਚਨੁ ਦੇਹਿ ਛੋਡਿ ਨ ਜਾਸਾ ਹੇ॥  
ਪਿਰਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਹਉ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਬੰਦਾ॥ ਓਹੁ ਭਾਰੋ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਜਿਸੁ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਛੰਦਾ॥  
ਜਿਚਰੁ ਰਾਖੈ ਤਿਚਰੁ ਤੁਮ ਸੰਗਿ ਰਾਹਣਾ ਜਾ ਸਦੇ ਤ ਉਠਿ ਸਿਧਾਸਾ ਹੇ॥

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The beloved (body) tells the lover (soul),  
*I can enjoy only when you are with me. Therefore, I request you to promise not to ever leave me.*

The lover (soul) says,  
*I obey my Master (Waheguru) Who is the Greatest and is not indebted (obliged) to anyone. (He does not need to consult anyone. He makes independent decisions.) Whenever He recalls me, I shall have to go.*

When 'I' was in 'MY' body, you could see 'ME'. When 'I' became sad, angry, or happy, 'I' was able to express 'MY' feelings to the people through 'MY' body. Otherwise 'MY' body is just inert matter; it cannot become sad or angry. It can express 'MY' mood only when 'I' am there in it. The moment 'I' leave the body, it cannot hear, see, or move. It was 'I' who listened, who saw, and who reacted. 'MY' body was only a medium. Do you understand now, who 'I' am?

(ii) Let's attempt to look at 'ME' from another angle. One evening 'I' was enjoying a cup of tea in a cheerful mood. 'MY' son brought his school report showing very poor progress. 'MY' mood changed instantly and 'I' became very angry in a moment after reading the report. Can you trace the source of 'MY' anger, or trace the path on which 'MY' happiness left 'ME'? If you had cut open every cell of 'MY' body, you will not discover any happiness or anger anywhere. You know that 'I' become angry and happy almost every day. In 'MY' body, there is no place where you can find any mind or mood even though we know it is always there directing 'MY' actions and feelings.

(iii) Let's try to understand this paradox -- 'I' am in 'MY' body but 'I' am nowhere in it. Holy persons say that each of us consists of two things, inert matter or our visible body and "livingness" or soul, the cause of our life. The soul is the reflection of Waheguru, the Cause of all lives. Our soul (*Atma*) is a part of the Whole (*Parmatma*), Waheguru.

Now let us assume that the physical Universe (which we know is limitless), is the visible form of Waheguru. The principle (about which we do not know anything) which keeps it working in a regular and systematic manner ever since its origin is the Great Soul, the invisible Waheguru. This means we cannot and will never be able to describe Waheguru in our words or in the physical forms known to our senses.

The Universe, the 'Body of Waheguru', like 'MY' body is undergoing changes all the time and the Great Soul like 'Me' (soul) remains unchanged and ever continuous. 'I' existed before the birth of 'MY' body, and will continue to exist after the death of 'MY' body till 'I' merge with Waheguru as a river merges in the sea. Similarly, the Great Soul existed before the Universe was created and will continue to exist even after the destruction of the Universe.

This comparison fails in one important aspect. The Great Soul controls the creation and working of the Universe. 'I' can not direct the birth, growth or death of 'MY' body. It had to act under the directions of the Great Soul which directs the whole Universe. The Great Soul is the Generator, Operator, and Destroyer of this Universe, hence Its name, GOD, Waheguru.

(iv) *Gurbani* explains why we fail to 'find' Waheguru, Who is living in every person, by giving an example of a musk deer. The deer smells musk and runs in different directions to find it but remains unsuccessful. He searches for it outside whereas the musk is inside his own body, hence he fails. It is only when the hunters get him and take the musk from the pouch

near his navel that he comes to know of it. In the same way we run out to find Waheguru but remain unsuccessful. It is only when the soul leaves the body that we know we are a reflection of Waheguru inside the body. This reflection is the sustaining principle of the body.

ਘਰ ਹੀ ਮਹਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਭਰਪੂਰੁ ਹੈ ਮਨਮੁਖਾ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ॥

ਜਿਉ ਕਸਤੂਰੀ ਮਿਰਗੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਕ੍ਰਮਦਾ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਇਆ॥ Page 644

In conclusion, we may say that we know the Great Soul, Waheguru, is True, not an illusion. He is the Creator of the Universe and is existing in it like 'I' in 'MY' body. He is sans-fear and sans-enmity because there is none else except Him; He does not grow old or die, i.e., He is beyond time ; He does not undergo the cycle of birth and death; being self-created, He has no father or mother. Guru Nanak described this in the following words:

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ  
ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥ Page 1

(v) Before proceeding further the reader may like to know the scientific stand for the statement mentioned earlier: The physical Universe which we know is unknowable.

In an article regarding Albert Einstein in the newspaper, Kitchener-Waterloo Record, Mr. Eugene T. Mallove mentioned:

*Einstein wrote: "A religious person is devout in the sense that he has no doubt of the significance and loftiness of those super-personal objects and goals which neither require nor are capable of rational foundation." Einstein did not believe that science would*

ever know all that could be known about the world. He confided in a friend: **"Possibly we shall know a little more than we do now. But the real nature of things, that we shall never know, never."**

The same point is the major theme of cosmologist Edward Harrison's recent book, *Masks of the Universe*. Harrison eloquently traces humanity's quest to understand the world and says that in every age our world model or "universe" was thought to be the real "universe". This was the "magic universe" of pre-history in which the animism of all objects formed a continuum with living beings. This gave way to a succession of mythic universes with multiple powerful gods as prime movers. Thence came a medieval universe and a succession of physical universes.

Harrison suggests that we shall never know the true "Universe" no matter how we embellish our transitory "universe". **Harrison stands with Einstein in believing in the ultimately unattainable "universe".**

He was impressed with the comprehensibility of the universe. After all, one could imagine a chaotic world without rhyme or reason - a world impossible to understand by any simple set of laws. But the world is far from that way. It is strikingly regulated. Einstein believed that faith in this regularity came from 'religion': "Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. The source of this feeling, religion, without science is blind."

Albert Einstein also saw God as Mother Nature. Central to his religiosity was, in his words a "rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

**Gurmat says:**

ਆਪਹਿ ਸੁਖਮ ਆਪਹਿ ਅਸਬੂਲਾ॥ ਲਖੀ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਨਾਨਕ ਲੀਲਾ॥

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ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ॥ ਤਿਸਦੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ॥

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Both the physical universe and the spirit controlling it are nothing but Waheguru Himself as His visible and invisible forms which are beyond description.



In the whole universe Waheguru is the real source of life; everything is because of Him.

Mystics say they can understand Waheguru but cannot describe Him to us beyond the physical human senses. The example of a mute person enjoying the sweet taste of sugar was mentioned earlier. There are several more examples to get conceptually as near the answer as possible.

### **(B) IMMANENT WAHEGURU:**

(i) The Statement "Waheguru is everywhere but we need other 'eyes' to see Him" is often sung in the Gurdwaras.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇ ਅਖੜੀਆਂ ਬਿਅੰਨਿ ਜਿਨੀ ਡਿਸੰਦੇ ਮਾ ਪਿਰੀ॥ Page 577

To explain this, we may take the example of the sun. Our daily life revolves around this great gift of Waheguru, and we may not know about it. The petroleum we use, the juice we drink, the cereals, vegetables, and fruit we eat, all have sun (actually the sun's energy) in them. However, we don't see or feel any sun in them. We know that plants and trees absorb sun light (energy) to grow and produce food for other living beings. Trees when buried in the earth over a long period get converted into coal and petroleum. They release the energy received from the sun when we burn them.

In the same way Waheguru, the great Sun of Suns, is the cause of the whole creation and is in the

creation but without being visible to us. There is nothing without Him, not even the sun, stars, human beings, animals, plants, etc. Waheguru is everywhere, Waheguru is nowhere. Waheguru is immanent and transcendent. Waheguru thus appears to be a paradox when any one tries to describe Him.

(ii) One more example from our daily life can illustrate this character of Waheguru. We know the earth has a force of gravity. Things fall towards it, rather than floating away from it when they are thrown upwards. Gravity is not visible to the eye. We also know it is unborn; it does not grow old; it neither increases nor decreases with the passage of time. It is there in the same intensity even before man came to know of it. It exists in the earth but there is no place where it is stored in quantity and can be dug out like coal, but still we observe it acting everywhere and all the time. Waheguru similarly is invisible, unborn and beyond the effects of time. He is everywhere and nowhere. He is the cause of the universe and its working, in the same way as gravity is the cause of things falling on earth.

(iii) Sometimes Waheguru as a Creator is compared with a painter. People can see the character of a painter in his paintings. Similarly Waheguru's character can be seen in His creation. To learn how to see a painter in his painting, one needs training and education in that subject. Similarly, training and education in spirituality can guide a person to see Waheguru in His creation. Nobody can show or describe Waheguru to

any other human being. But human beings can be trained to "see" Waheguru themselves. This is what *Gurbani* teaches a disciple who wants to know Waheguru. Under the guidance of *Gurbani*, we can learn virtues of Waheguru and enjoy His love, but we cannot fully describe our feelings to others.

### **Limitlessness of Waheguru**

(i) The fact that even though we are the reflections of Waheguru, but can not understand or describe Waheguru, can be explained in another way as well.

Imagine yourself standing on the seashore with a handful of sea water. Throw the water back in the ocean. You find that you have drops of water clinging to your hands. Imagine yourself to be that drop of water and Waheguru to be the sea. The drops are seawater but not the sea. There is no way a drop of water can explain what the sea is. The sea is not just a very, very large collection of drops which the drops can imagine or discuss between themselves. It is much more than that. It has different depths because of its variable bottom level; it has waves of various heights moving about in it and striking among themselves or against the shore; there are hot and cold water currents running in the sea; innumerable kinds of plankton as well as fauna and flora float there, etc. All these things can in no way be represented in a drop of water, even though undoubtedly it is a part of the sea. The drops can never think of, or understand all these properties of the sea. In the same way, our souls are re-

flections of Waheguru, but are not able to understand or describe Waheguru.

(ii) Here is another example to explain our limitations in describing or understanding what is Waheguru.

In your house there is a glass aquarium with a frog. You move the frog to your swimming pool. It would be extremely happy to swim around its "very large new house." At that time your friend brings a frog from the sea to temporarily keep in your pool. The dialogue between the two frogs could be like this:

*Pet Frog: Mr. Sea Frog, welcome to my new big house!*

*Sea Frog looks with surprise on hearing the words "big house" and says: Thanks a lot Mr. P.*

*Pet Frog swims a couple of yards and asks: Was your previous house this big?*

*Sea Frog: Much bigger than this!*

*Pet Frog, after covering the whole pool, repeats his question: Was it this big?*

*Sea Frog repeats the reply: Much bigger than this!*

*Pet Frog: How could it be bigger than all this, the biggest ever possible?*

*Sea Frog: I cannot describe it. The only thing I can say is neither I nor my parents, nor anyone else could ever know its limits. Millions like me lived there without knowing it. There are millions of very big animals also in the sea. None of them could ever reach the limits. The wise told us: When you reach a limit, that is the limit of your imagination and thinking, not the*

*limit of our house. The house is without limits, water, water, water, everywhere and all through. I enjoyed living there.*

A human being, similarly, even after enjoying and delving in the love of Waheguru, cannot describe its limits or its mystery, except by saying WOW! GREAT! or GOSH! In Panjabi we say WAH!; hence the name WAHEGURU for God. In Sikh scripture God is remembered by many names describing His virtues, such as : Karta Purkh, Ram, Rahim, Akal Purkh, Sat Nam, Parbraham, Kartar, Gopal, etc.

Mystery too, was the key to Einstein's religious sentiments.

*It was the experience of mystery--even if mixed with fear--that engendered religion. A knowledge of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds--it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity; in this sense and in this sense alone, I am a deeply religious man.*

## **Human Limitations**

(i) There are many directions of life which we can not imagine or understand at the present level of human knowledge. To understand our limitations, let us briefly go through the classic example of a pencil being pushed into water and observed by an insect. The insect floating on water has the concept of length and breadth only and not of height or depth. When the

tip of the pencil is dipped into water, it appears as a small circle (disc) to the insect. When we push the pencil downwards, the insect will observe the circle growing bigger and bigger. Even when the insect has seen the whole pencil it can never understand its true shape. And there is no way to describe to him the shape of the pencil.

We humans know only three dimensions, length, width, and height. Recently a fourth dimension, time has been added by the scientists to our knowledge. Physical environment is another dimension which we do not understand fully so as to express it empirically. We know a dry seed retains the same size and shape with the passage of time. However, it germinates and grows to become a seedling under optimum environment. A person ignorant of the 'environment' direction cannot 'observe' the plant existing in the seed.

This is one way of saying that it is impossible to imagine Waheguru without knowing all the dimensions of life. We see Waheguru operating and living with us all the time, but we cannot understand Him completely and correctly. We get a very different perspective of Waheguru when some holy person describes Him to us. Our senses have only limited dimensions. Waheguru has many dimensions including physical, metaphysical, spiritual and others unknown to us.

(ii) One more example of our limitations is necessary before we conclude this discussion regarding "Immanent Waheguru."

Assume you are watching television. If you close your eyes you can hear the sound, but you cannot see the figures on the screen. If you plug your ears, you cannot hear any sound though you can see the figures on the screen moving their lips. Only when both ears and eyes are open, you can fully understand what is happening on the screen of the television. Similarly, not our physical bodies but our souls can listen to Waheguru. We can know Waheguru only through love.

We can now, from all that we have discussed, reach some conclusions.

**Like holy people, we too can 'see' Waheguru and 'know' Him through love, but we cannot describe Him in physical words. This is because our senses have limitations. Waheguru is Love, Truth, Un-born, Creator, and Everlasting. There being He alone, both in physical and non-physical form, He is sans-fear, and sans-enmity. Guru Nanak Dev, to tell these virtues of Waheguru, said:**

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ  
ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥ Page 1

In the end, a common experience needs to be mentioned . Once the author asked his host to give him the directions to the house of their common friend. He said, "I know the landmarks leading to his house and can take you there, but I cannot describe to you how to get there. Even if I try to tell you, you will not understand. The only way is that I drive ahead of you and you follow me." Similarly we have to 'follow' holy

persons and do what they ask us to do, i.e., love Waheguru ourselves and 'see' Him vibrating everywhere in the Universe. Don't expect anyone to explain Waheguru to you just by talking. Love Him, enjoy Him, and that is the simple and only way to know Him and understand Him.

After going through this draft, one youth observed:

*I think Waheguru is a grand plaza. Anything one can think of, and also, one cannot think of, is there. One can describe what one can see. Here It is limitless. There are shops, shops, shops ..., each of a different kind. Leave aside the knowing of the things inside the shops, one cannot know the number, size or kind of shops there.*

## **(C) CREATION**

(i) To humans, it will ever remain a mystery how Waheguru created the universe and from where he got the first molecule of matter. As mentioned earlier, just imagine a drop of water trying to know how big the sea is and how it was created. The drop of water can never discover the answer. *Gurbani* says our search for Waheguru is like the search of the sea by the drops. A grain of sugar sent down in the sea to know the depth of the water can never come back to tell the story. Our lives are too short to realize the depth of the creation or the Creator. We cannot find the boundary of even its single direction or aspect.



(ii) There is another facet of the creation of this universe. Waheguru created this universe for us to enjoy and to do our duty. Finding out when and how the universe was created is not the goal of our life. While sitting at a dining table, you don't think of asking questions regarding the table such as where was the wood grown, who cut the wood, who shipped it to the factory, who built the table, who polished it, etc. We are to sit there and eat our food. Even if someone has answers to these questions, they are not related to the eating of food nor is it important to know them.

*Gurmat* says this life is not to be wasted in meaningless pursuits. Let us accept the creation of the earth, sun, and everything else that is here with us. We also know they will continue to be here even after we die. Therefore, let us get busy with the mission of human life (*To love humanity, serve it and realize Waheguru*) and do as much as we can with the limited period of time available to us.

(iii) It is only an assumption or hypothesis that a big bang created our universe. We do not know the facts. Even if the bang theory is true, the question, who created the bang, still remains unanswered. Some power shall have to be held responsible for causing the bang and later guiding the molecules to become alive. Surely, a soul, the existence of which has been proved again and again, cannot be accepted to have been created during the big bang. It has to have a Creator, the Lord, whom we call Waheguru, the Almighty. Regarding creation, *Gurmat* says the following:

ਕੀਤਾ ਪਸਾਉ ਏਕੋ ਕਵਾਉ॥ ਤਿਸਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਲਖ ਦਰੀਆਉ॥ Page 3

With His single order whole creation came into existence and millions of rivers (sources of lives) were created.

ਸਾਚੇ ਤੇ ਪਵਨਾ ਭਇਆ ਪਵਨੈ ਤੇ ਜਲੁ ਹੋਇ॥

ਜਲ ਤੇ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣੁ ਸਾਜਿਆ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੋਇ॥ Page 19

Waheguru created the gases; the gases produced water. From water many forms of life originated. He is in everyone.

Whatever visible nature there is, it may be considered as “visible” Waheguru or the “body” of Waheguru. The invisible force which we think is energy may be accepted as Waheguru in His invisible form.

**Let's make a start with this knowledge and work further. We also surely will be able to 'see' Waheguru as sages have already done.**

## (D) FOUNDING OF FAITHS

(i) Man, as we know, is an animal but highly developed. He can think and has the power of articulated speech. Based only on the life cycle of birth, growth, and death, he finds himself to be no different from animals. The first thought of man which distinguished humans from other animals was, “What is the purpose of my life?” In other words, man is a man only if he attempts to achieve the goal of his life. Without working for that goal, he is like any other animal on this earth.

“What is the purpose of human life?” is a profound and complex question before mankind, like the question “What is Waheguru?” Anyone answering

this question has been considered a wise and a holy person. People believe such a person was blessed by Waheguru Who gave him all knowledge through intuition and mystic experience. The directions for the people set by the holy person were called **a faith or a religion**. He was recognized as a prophet and the founder of that faith.

Among the major religions, there are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc., in the West. In the East, we have Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Vedant, Jainism, collectively called Hinduism. Buddhism and Sikhism also took birth in the East.

(ii) Man founded another branch of knowledge concerned with establishing and systematizing facts by experiments and called it **science**. Recent achievements in science have shaken the basis of many faiths. The people are losing faith in some beliefs of their faiths because science has proved many old beliefs to be incorrect. People are, therefore, forced to decide which one is right, faith or science. Science can demonstrate and prove its truth. Therefore, many people give up their beliefs which are proved wrong by science. Some people, however, continue to stick to their beliefs ignoring the truths discovered by science.

About four centuries ago, an Italian astronomer named Galileo (1564-1642) concluded from his observations that the earth revolves around the sun. He was imprisoned for 'preaching' anti-Christian belief. **However on October 5, 1989, the Pope appeared on the television to confess that Galileo was right and**

**those who punished the scientist for his discoveries were wrong.**

The sun and moon were considered gods by ancient people in India. Therefore, they celebrate *Sankrant* (first day of the solar month), *Pooranmasi* (full moon and), *Amavas* (no moon) as sacred days. *Gurbani* rejected this thought by saying:

ਬਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ॥ Page 843

Only idiots and naive people believe and worship particular dates or days of the week as sacred.

Scientists have now studied not only the sun and moon but many other planets. They do not accept them as gods. Science has thus endorsed the five-centuries-old Sikh thought referred to above. However, how unfortunate it is that some Sikhs under the influence of the tradition still celebrate these days as sacred days. They ignore not only Sikh beliefs but also the findings of the science.

(iii) The Sikh religion is unique and it does not clash with any known scientific facts; rather, it does not enter the field of science. Unfortunately, because of the Brahmanical influence all around the Sikhs, the Sikh philosophy is being distorted. Continuous attempts are being made to fit it with the old Vedic and Upanisadic thoughts which *Gurbani* has emphatically rejected. (Read *Sikhism a Revolt against Brahmanism* by the same author).

Miss Pearl S. Buck, a Nobel laureate, while giving her comments on the English translation of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, wrote,

*I have studied the scriptures of the great religions, but I do not find anywhere else the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find in these volumes ..There is something strangely modern about these scriptures and this puzzled me until I learned that they are in fact comparatively modern, compiled as late as the 16th century ..They speak to a person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.*

### **(E) WHY EVIL?**

(i) The existence of evil is a Western thought. Sikhism does not agree with this thought. According to the Bible, God created Adam. Later, from Adam's rib, God created Eve to be Adam's companion. Satan (Evil) misguided them to eat the forbidden fruit. Adam thus became a sinner for disobeying God and was then thrown out of Heaven. We, all humans, being Adam's children, are born sinners and, therefore, we all will go to Hell. However, if we believe in Christ as the only Son of God (according to Christianity) or in Mohammed as the last messenger of God (according to Islam) and follow their instructions we will be saved. On the Judgment Day, these believers will be taken to everlasting Heaven. Non-believers will go to Hell, where they will suffer forever.

***According to the Sikh faith, there is no particular place which is Heaven or Hell. This earth is our 'play ground' and while living on it, we have to***

***play the part assigned to us. Gurmat says a person is in Hell if he forgets God and is in Heaven if he loves God. Satan or evil has no existence.***

ਕਬੀਰ ਆਸਾ ਕਰੀਐ ਰਾਮ ਕੀ ਅਵਰੈ ਆਸ ਨਿਰਾਸ॥

ਨਰਕਿ ਪਰਹਿ ਤੇ ਮਾਨਈ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਉਦਾਸ॥ 95 ॥ Page 1369

ਤਹਾ ਬੈਕੁੰਨੁ ਜਹ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੂੰ ਆਪੇ ਸਰਧਾ ਲਾਇਹਿ॥ Page 749

We can discuss some scientific facts to explain this. Heat exists but its counterpart cold does not exist. It is merely the deficiency or scarcity of heat. Also, darkness does not exist; it is the light which exists. Absence or deficiency of light is called darkness. No doubt we feel cold and observe darkness but they have no physical existence. Evil does not exist, only goodness exists. It is simply the deficiency or the absence of goodness which we have named evil.

Some happenings which we do not like (therefore consider them to be evils) are actually not evil. Think of a father asking an unwilling child to take a shower. Failing to motivate the child to take a shower on his own, he uses force to put the child under the shower against his wish. The child thinks the father is a "devil" forcing him to do something 'bad'. We, however, know that the shower is necessary for the good health of the child who wrongly thinks it to be an evil act of the father. After experiencing the benefits of a regular shower, the child, when he becomes a father, will force his child in the same way to take a shower.

Sun, rain, and storms all are needed for the good life of man. Some places are warm and humid, while others are extremely cold (polar regions.) In between these two extremes, all kinds of climate exist on

this earth. These extremes are actually the requirements for the comfortable life of some kinds of animals and plants. The variable climate is not for bothering the living beings but for producing a variety of foods and many kinds of physical environment for them to live in and enjoy.

Waheguru is a Father. He forces many things on us to keep us healthy and right. He is a great teacher and has His own ways of teaching us. Waheguru created fire, so that we can keep ourselves warm and cook our food. The fire, when it is out of our control or when we mishandle it, burns us. It may look to be an evil act but it teaches us a lesson about how to use fire with caution. **Similarly, our feelings of self-respect, when misused, can become ego to hurt us.** We can become possessive, greedy, or miserly, thereby taking the rights of other people and forcing many people to go hungry; this is an evil act.

(ii) The most common example mentioned in the debate over *"what is evil?"* is the eating of the weaker by the stronger. It may not be evil, but may be the way of Waheguru to keep the cycle of living beings continuous. Many animals are herbivores, some are carnivores, and still others are omnivores. Plants are eaten by animals. Like animals, plants are also living beings. Eating of the plants by the herbivorous animals is not an evil act. It is a law of nature for the growth and reproduction of herbivores. Plants grow, produce seeds, get old, and die. When dead, they are broken down to earth by the microbes. When the animals, having eaten the plants all through their lives, die, they

are also consumed by microbes. These herbivores might be eaten by other bigger carnivores who themselves die and turn to earth again. The same thing in a cycle happens at the next higher level. Everything returns back to the soil to start another cycle of life.

A fish eats a small fish. It is in turn eaten by a bigger fish who is eaten by a still bigger fish and finally a whale eats them all. When whales die, they are eaten by many kinds of microbes. Eating of one living being by another looks evil to us, but it is a part of the system in the cycle of nature. Evil is only when we disregard the job assigned to us or if we do something which we are not supposed to do, i.e. **practice lust, ego, anger, hatred, greed, jealousy, etc. Killing or hurting under the influence of these vicious thoughts is an evil act.** These vices grow in us only when we forget to love our Father and His children. Love of God keeps all vices away, hence saves us from committing sins and evil acts.

## **(F) EVERYTHING IS IN HIS HANDS**

The statement that everything is in God's hands is not understood properly; this needs some detailed explanation.

Let us first analyze a simple worldly experience. The government builds roads and they make rules and regulations for driving vehicles. People have not only to learn driving, but also to know the rules and regulations for safe driving. If a driver goes through a red light and meets an accident, it is due neither to the failure of the



rules nor to the lack of his driving skill. It is simple disobedience by the driver. If the driver knew the rules but he didn't bother to follow them, the cause of the accident is the disrespect shown to the rules.

Something similar happens in our daily lives. Sometimes we land ourselves in trouble because we didn't care to listen to the rules made for us by Waheguru. At another time, we may know the rules but we disrespect them, which causes us to get into trouble.

**People have to know the rules of Nature and also follow them.** The government does not create accidents; they are caused by the failure of the drivers. Waheguru does not plan 'accidents' (evil) for us; the failure is on our part. There is no devil or Satan to misguide us and put us in trouble. It is we ourselves who fail to follow Waheguru's rules and create trouble for ourselves.

Waheguru has given us intellect and physical competence to act according to certain basic principles of life. We are to use them and not sit like stones. When we act we have many ideas before us and many kinds of forces acting on us. Greed, anger, ego, love, sympathy, desire for service, etc. direct our actions toward others. ***Teaching and preaching are required to help a person make the right decisions. Virtues lead us to peace and vices lead us to trouble.*** Our happiness or sorrow depends upon the feelings under which we act. It is not justified to blame Waheguru for our failures or evil acts. *To free ourselves of the guilt of doing antisocial or illegal acts, we tell ourselves that everything is in the hands of Waheguru; a human can*

*do nothing.* This is trying to “act smart.” Actually, by this we only fool ourselves.

There is a classic example of how this principle, “I do not do anything; everything is done by Waheguru” works and how its misuse is stopped. A second-time thief was sentenced by the judge for one year in jail. On hearing the sentence the thief addressed the judge, “Sir, do you believe in Waheguru, the Almighty Judge and that He does everything?”

Judge: Yes, I do.

Thief: Waheguru made me commit this theft according to His Will. Therefore, it is wrong for you to send **me** to jail.

Judge: You are sentenced for two years. Do not blame **me** for increasing your sentence. You know that I cannot do anything; everything is done by Waheguru.

*The thief learned the lesson of his life -- it is wrong to hold God responsible for what one intentionally plans to do or does under the pressure of vices.*

*We cannot ignore the knowledge of good or bad while living this life.*

ਕਬੀਰ ਮਨੁ ਜਾਨੈ ਸਭ ਬਾਤ ਜਾਨਤ ਹੀ ਅਉਗਨੁ ਕਰੈ॥

ਕਾਰੇ ਕੀ ਕੁਸਲਾਤ ਹਾਥਿ ਦੀਪੁ ਕੂਏ ਪਰੈ॥ 216 ॥ Page 1376

An ignorant person can be saved from doing wrong acts. But how can that person be saved who knowingly commits sins?

### **Why does Waheguru not stop us?**

(i) Waheguru does stop us from doing bad things or wrong things. He has His own ways; we have to understand them. While jumping you may sprain your ankle. It gets swollen and it gives you much pain.

That is Waheguru's (nature's) way of forcing rest on us. When you get sick, you become weak and do not wish to move about; rather you feel like remaining in bed. That is what Waheguru wants you to do to get into good health.

The same principle works on a larger scale too. If a king is inefficient or unjust the people replace him (if need be, by violence). Maybe a neighboring king will attack him, defeat him and take over his kingdom for better management. The world goes on and nature continues to act according to its principles. We may or may not observe them being implemented by the Great Governor, Waheguru.

(ii) Sometimes we do not know the greater plan of Waheguru and we may not be clear about the part assigned to us. We are supposed to perform our duty with the competency given to us. **The world is a huge drama conducted and directed by Waheguru.** In a drama an actor is required to act according to the will of the director, and not according to his own liking.

In a drama, the son of a wealthy person was assigned the job of a beggar. He acted like a beggar even though he knew very well that he is not a beggar. He was doing the duty assigned to him by the director of the drama. He won an award for good acting. Similarly, in this world, the director, Waheguru, has assigned different kinds of duties to different people. Waheguru may make us rich, poor, a scholar, a common man, handsome or handicapped. But the situation in which He puts us, should not matter while we are doing the duty assigned to us. Wherever we are placed,

we should do our duty honestly, sincerely, and devotedly, being neither jealous of others nor suffering from any ego.

## **2. Even if there is God why should people worship Him?**

We do not bribe or oblige God when we worship Him. If a person is swimming in a pool, he does not oblige the water or the pool; he is enjoying himself. To worship God is to revel in His virtues and to be benefited by them. **We do not worship God to benefit Him.** He does not need anything from us, not even His worship. We do it for our own benefit. The sun does not benefit if we sit in the sun and enjoy its warmth. When we worship God, we sit in the “sunshine” of His virtues to benefit from them and not to please Him.

The example of a good social act can also help us to understand. A student gets training from a teacher, becomes a professional and gets a good job. Being happy with the job, he brings a gift to the teacher and expresses thanks to him for his help and guidance. Offering a gift to the teacher is not giving a charity or any donation to him. This act only expresses the feelings of happiness and also the gratitude of the trainee to his teacher. Waheguru is a great Teacher. **When we offer money or we bow our head to the Guru Granth Sahib, which describes the virtues of Waheguru to us, we express our gratitude and thanks to Waheguru; we do not oblige Him.** It is wrong to think that we can give anything to Waheguru. We are always receiving unlimited favors from Him. As

custodians of His gifts we only handle them (share them with others), we do not create them or give them to anyone else.

Worship of Waheguru means to love Waheguru, to love His virtues and to love truth. The purpose is that these good qualities and virtues become a part of our life. These virtues will keep us happy and blessed with favors of Waheguru.

### **3. God has no shape, form, or body. If nobody can describe God, how could the Gurus do that?**

The Gurus have told us about the greatness and the limitlessness of Waheguru. The Gurus have written hymns describing the virtues of Waheguru but it does not mean that they described the limits of Waheguru or His virtues. They taught us how to sing His praises and how to benefit from them. They showed us the path to Waheguru. It does not mean that they have presented Waheguru in totality to us. One can feel Him, enjoy Him, but cannot limit Him in words.

### **4. How did God create the first man, woman, or the first person?**

According to Sikhism this question is outside the domain of religion. To know it is not the religious goal of our life as stated earlier. *Gurmata* wants us to marvel by thinking of the Creator and the creation, and not bother about the process of creation.

Sikhism does not speculate about how this earth was created or how the human race came into

being. In general terms we find some references relating to creation. They actually are mentioned to tell the greatness and virtues of Waheguru. *Gurbani* states that before creation there was Waheguru alone for an unknown period. Everything came into being by His Order and Will. Nobody knows how and when the universe was created. If anybody knew he would have told it. Only Waheguru knows when he created it and how he created it.

ਅਰਬਦ ਨਰਬਦ ਧੰਧੁਕਾਰਾ॥ ਧਰਣਿ ਨ ਗਗਨਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਅਪਾਰਾ॥ ...  
ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦੀਸੈ ਏਕੋ ਸੋਈ॥ Page 1035

ਬਿਤਿ ਵਾਰੁ ਨਾਜੋਗੀ ਜਾਣੈ ਰੁਤਿ ਮਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ॥  
ਜਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਿਰਠੀ ਕਉ ਸਾਜੈ ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੋਈ॥ Page 4

In this universe three phenomena -- creation, evolution, and destruction -- are taking place continuously. We know the process of evolution involves both creation and destruction. Many species were created on this earth with different physical and intellectual capabilities. Some species became extinct because they could not face the changing environment. Dinosaurs are just one example. They evolved on this earth and became extinct. Even today, we find many new species being created and also see many species becoming endangered or extinct.

The life on this earth is undergoing continuous change, i.e., reproduction, evolution, and destruction. How and when exactly did man join this cycle and how long will he continue to be a part of it? No one is and no one can be definite about it. The answers differ with different religious leaders. Scientists have found fossils

to conclude that we, Homo sapiens, are the fourth evolved species. When our predecessors first started walking erect, they belonged to the species named Homo erectus, which (along with other species) now is extinct.

According to the Sikh faith, this question is of little significance and of no religious importance. **The real and urgent issue before us is not when and how we humans were created, but what is the goal of this life, and how is that goal to be achieved.** As mentioned earlier, we have to pursue that goal in our life.

The significance of this can be explained by one simple example. A child was given a paper and pencil to write his name and address so that he could be admitted to the school. However, he wanted to find out who made the paper, where and when it was made, how it was made, etc. If he kept himself engaged in finding answers to questions regarding paper, pencil and his desk, he would have wasted his time and failed to answer the questions asked of him for his admission. He, being involved in unnecessary activity, might lose his chance of admission to the school and hence remain ever ignorant. However, if he joined the school, in due course of time, he would learn answers to many of his questions. Some questions, of course, will ever remain unanswered.

In the same way we should do our duty assigned to us by Waheguru. We should love Him, His virtues and His children. In due course of time we will be able to know the answers to those questions which

we are anxious to know now, but are not competent to understand at present.



## Chapter II

# SIKH FAITH

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### (A) THE FAITH

**1. Sikhism, you said, is the faith of the modern age. How long would it take to be that from what it is now? If our religion is so great, then why do people ask me, "What is your religion?" and say, "I have never heard of that religion before."**

(i) The Sikh religion has already been recognized to be a faith for the modern age. If some persons ask you about your religion it is because of their simple ignorance. There is so much in this world to keep the minds of the people occupied that they do not even know where London is or who Buddha was. We should not feel surprised at the ignorance of the people (we may be equally ignorant about others); rather, we should do whatever we can to remove their ignorance.

The World Conference of Religions for Peace, in 1979, was actually endorsing the basic principles of the Sikh faith when they, in their meeting at New Jersey, concluded:

*Too often the names and practices of our religions have been associated with warfare and strife. Now we must reverse this by:*

*(a) Breaking down barriers of prejudice and hostility between religious communities and institutions.*

*(b) Confronting the powers of the world with the teachings of our religions rather than conforming to them when they act contrary to the well-being of humanity.*

*(c) Building inter-religious understanding in our local communities particularly where prejudices run strong.*

The above statements are the basic principles of the Sikh faith reworded in modern language. The Gurus preached these principles of religious tolerance and brotherhood of humanity five hundred years ago when they said:

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਠਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰਗਾਈ॥ Page 611

The whole humanity is one brotherhood and God is the only Father for all of us.

The Gurus remembered God by many names, e.g., Ram, Gobind, Hari, Allah, Rahim, Karim, etc., then used by the followers of different religions. The Guru Granth Sahib is the **only Holy Scripture** which mentions with respect all such names and which includes the writings of holy people born in different religions. Kabir is a so-called low caste weaver, Farid is a Muslim, Ravidas is a shoe-maker and considered an untouchable by Hindus, *Nam Dev* is a calico printer, a low caste, and Dhanna is a simple farmer. The hymns of more than 2 dozen such holy men are included in

the Adi Guru Granth Sahib in addition to the hymns of the Gurus.

Guru Nanak preached that there is one God, one humanity and one faith. His founding of the institution of *Sangat* (praying together as equals) and *Pangat* (eating together as equals without any discrimination or favor to anyone, whatever one's faith, caste, color, etc.) to educate people regarding the brotherhood of man, makes the Sikh faith the religion for the modern age. Five hundred years earlier the followers of different religions were quarreling (some are doing so even today) to prove their religion to be better than that of the others. Guru Nanak preached that not hollow rituals but sincere actions benefit a person here and after his death. He declared that it is futile to argue which religion or which name of God is better than the other. All names, whether God, Ram, or Allah, are equally good. What matters is one's love for Him and His children. In the same way, a child can address his father as dad, papa, or daddy, but it is the love and respect for the father which matters and not the name the child uses to address him.

The opinion of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, quoted above, shows a U-turn from the old stand of the religious leaders. Earlier the leaders believed (some even believe now) that their religion is the only true religion and unless a person accepts that religion, he will not be saved. Now, they have come to realize that their old beliefs do not fit with the modern thinking and will not be accepted in the future. Human equality and non-insistence on a particular way of worshipping God were preached by Guru Nanak to re-

lease the masses from the clutches of pseudo-religious people. These Sikh principles have now been accepted by religious leaders and scholars as a faith for the modern age and a hope for peace.

(ii) Here are some of the comments of modern scholars regarding the Sikh philosophy. The opinions of Professor Toynbee, Pearl S. Buck, a Nobel Laureate, and H.L. Bradshaw have already been given. (see Introduction)

According to another scholar, John C. Archer, *"The religion of the Adi Granth is a universal and practical religion.....Due to ancient prejudices of the Sikhs it could not spread in the world. **The world needs today its message of peace and love.**"*

Dorothy Field in her book, *The Religion of the Sikhs*, writes:

*Pure Sikhism is far above dependence on Hindu rituals and is capable of a distinct position as a **world religion** so long as the Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness. The religion is also one which should appeal to the occidental mind. It is essentially a practical religion. If judged from the pragmatic stand point which is a favorite point of view in some quarters, **it would rank almost first in the world.***

It will not be out of place to mention the comments of a Hindu mystic. Swami Nitya Nand (expired at the age of 135 years) writes in his book, *Gur Gian*:

*I, in the company of my guru, Brahma Nand Ji went to Mathra while on a pilgrimage tour ..., we reached Panjab and there we met Swami Satya Nand Udasi. He explained the philosophy and religious practices of Nanak in such a way that Swami Brahma Nand Ji enjoyed a mystic lore.*

*During the visit to the Golden Temple, Amritsar, his soul was affected so much that he became a devotee of the Guru. After spending some time in Panjab he went to Hardwar. Though he was hale and hearty, one day I saw tears in his eyes. I asked the reason for that. He replied, "I sifted sand for the whole of my life. **The truth was in the House of Nanak. I will have to take one more birth in that House, only then will I attain Kalyan.**" After saying that the soul left his body.*

*I also constantly meditate on Waheguru revealed by Nanak. First, I practiced Yoga Asnas under the guidance of Yogis and did that for many years. The bliss and peace which I enjoy now, were never obtained earlier.*

When the world religions are named today, Sikhism is named among the top six; they are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Sikhs do not form even 2% of the population of the country of their origin - India. The basic principles of the Sikh philosophy and contributions of the Sikhs to society have raised the status of their faith to that of a unique universal world religion. Unparalleled sacrifices were made by them to fight against state terrorism for protecting human rights and religious freedom of common people.

Having mentioned the opinions of some world scholars and mystics, the reader is left to decide himself/herself regarding the ranking of Sikhism among the world faiths. He/she also has to decide what his/her part is in educating society about these basic principles of the faith and the history of the Sikhs.

(iii) If a person asks you "*What is your religion?*" it reveals his ignorance about the Sikh faith while it

shows indifference on the part of the Sikhs themselves towards their faith. Many Sikhs themselves are not clear about the basic principles of their faith, its philosophy and its contributions to human rights. If the Sikhs themselves know this and explain it to their friends by living according to the Sikh principles, (not just knowing and talking about them) the world will know within a short period of time about Sikhism and its greatness.

All humans are born illiterate and ignorant. We have schools to teach people languages, art, science, etc. Parents also spend a lot of time at home to educate their children. Even then, (there should be no surprise) many American youth don't know where the headquarters of the United Nations are. People do not know about Sikhs because there is too much to be known and they are too busy in other pursuits of life. It is we who have to tell them about our faith. If we don't educate the masses about Sikhism, they are going to learn about it themselves, but very slowly. A few have already found it as mentioned above. Their writings are going to influence many more to know about the Sikh faith and guide their lives accordingly.

Think of the Christians who are all around us. Not just millions or billions, but trillions of dollars are being spent to preach Christianity. Christians are the rulers holding political power in their hands. They were once virtual rulers of the whole world. National holidays and social events are chosen according to Christian holy days. BUT STILL many youth are not accepting the major basic principles of Christianity and are not attracted towards it. In his recently published book, *For*

*Christ's Sake*, Tom Harper of the Toronto Star has the following to say:

*Christianity may well be thriving in parts of Africa and Asia today, but in the West Christian faith is eroding at an alarming rate. Secular humanism is fast becoming the prevailing "religion" of the Western world. For instance, it is no longer true to describe either Canada or England as a Christian country, since the vast majority of their respective populations have no traditional ties with any religious body (the Church of England has closed nine hundred churches since 1974). Added to this the fact that only a small fraction of children and young people now receive any religious instruction whatever, and the prognosis for the year 2000 looks very bleak indeed. The so-called mainline churches have much to learn about the use of mass media in communicating their message, **but no amount of technical sophistication will avail unless the message itself is one that makes sense.***

The last sentence is very significant. The above reference has been given here to tell the readers that the correct message is very important for the new generation. Along with this, the method of education is also very important. **Sikhs have the correct message but they have not developed the correct educational system.** This is the responsibility which falls on the shoulders of the Sikh youth. It is they who have to learn the basic principles of Sikhism, practice them in their life, and be a model for the rest of the youth. They have to adopt the modern methods to explain Sikhism to the youth of the modern age.

2. In *Rehras-Chaupai*, it is said, "(God), protect me by your hand and destroy all my enemies." In *Ardas*, we pray for the welfare of whole human-

**ity, "Sarbat Ka Bhala". Does the word Sarbat exclude our enemies? ਹਮਰੀ ਕਰੋ ਹਾਥ ਦੈ ਰੱਛਾ ... ਹਮਰੇ ਦੁਸਟ ਸਭੈ ਤੁਮ ਘਾਵਹੁ ॥ ਆਪ ਹਾਥ ਦੇ ਮੋਹਿ ਬਚਾਵਹੁ॥**

We mistakenly assume our enemies to be human beings. In spiritual life our enemies are those who mislead us from the path of truth and put us in trouble. The major ones among them are lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego. They are called "diseases" or "devils" which "kill" our soul. They attack our mind and fill it with vices destroying its virtues.

- i) ਪੰਚ ਦੋਖ ਅਸਾਧ ਜਾ ਮਹਿ ਤਾਕੀ ਕੋਤਕ ਆਸ॥ Page 486
- ii) ਪੰਚ ਬਿਖਾਦੀ ਏਕੁ ਗਰੀਬਾ ਰਾਖਹੁ ਰਾਖਨਹਾਰੇ॥ Page 205
- iii) ਨਿਹਤੇ ਪੰਜਿ ਜੁਆਨ ਮੈ ਗੁਰ ਬਾਪੀ ਦਿਤੀ ਕੰਡਿ ਜੀਉ॥ Page 74
- i) What hope could be there for a person suffering from Five 'incurable' Diseases.
- ii) The poor fellow is possessed by the Five Devils. My Savior, God, please save me from them.
- iii) With the blessings of the Guru, I overpowered the strong Five Youths (devils).

Out of these 'enemies', ego is the strongest one of all. However, there is a method to control it. If blessed by the Lord, the person meditates on His virtues and destroys his ego. This is mentioned in the *Gurbani* in the following words:

ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀਰਘ ਰੋਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੂ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ॥

ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰੇ ਜੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਤਾ ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਕਮਾਹਿ॥ Page 466

*Gurbani* teaches us to give up all Five and follow the path of *Gurmat*; obey the Will of the Lord rather than, obeying these evil thoughts.



ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ॥ Page 9

May it also be mentioned that the above hymn, in the beginning of the *Rehras*, refers to spiritual life and not to physical life. It means "I can live only if I remember God's Name. I die if I forget His Name." This life or death of a person is not related to the body; it refers to the soul. It tells that the soul is 'dead' if one does not love God.

*We conclude that the Sikhs wish well for all of humanity; they have no enemies. Evil thoughts or vices are to be avoided by a Sikh.* In physical terms, the Sikh philosophy says that if any violence is committed against an innocent person, he has a right to take up arms, to defend himself and the virtues he practices. While doing so he does not nurse any enmity against any individual, but he is protecting himself against that wrong thought which led the person to commit the violence.

**3. In Chopai , it says anyone who remembers God for a moment will be saved from the noose of death. Then why have Sikh soldiers, who remembered God, died?**

ਏਕ ਚਿਤ ਜਿਹ ਇਕ ਛਿਨ ਧਿਆਇਓ॥ ਕਾਲ ਫਾਸ ਕੇ ਬੀਚ ਨ ਆਇਓ॥

The answer to this question has already been given above.

This has been said in relation to the attainment of ever-lasting Peace. It is not concerned with the physical death of the body.

- 4. When we went to Gurdwaras in the cities, A and B (actual names withheld) they had Christmas decorations hung up. Why? Is it because Sikhs also have faith in Jesus? Why do Sikhs in some Gurdwaras celebrate New Year's Eve? It is related to the Christian calendar and not to the Sikh calendar, (Baisakhi).**

Dear youth, your (all who asked this question) keen observations and deep analytical approach deserves appreciation from all Sikhs. Your sensitivity to the non-Sikh practices in Gurdwaras will go a long way to awaken the Gurdwara management committees. Here are the answers to your questions.

**(a) Holiday Decorations:**

Gurdwaras are generally decorated all the time for aesthetic reasons, not just during the Christmas season only. Maybe, you went there during Christmas and hence you took them to be Christmas decorations. Or maybe, they were hung because of the Christmas season; in that case, it shows total ignorance of Sikh principles.

Sikhs do not have faith in Jesus and they neither celebrate Christmas as a religious day. However, any day can be celebrated as a community or a social day. Religious functions are celebrated through social activities. In due course of time, the religious aspect is forgotten and social activities take over the whole event. Some days are seasonal events and some religious aspect is connected with them to give sanctity to the function and attract more people to it. For exam-

ple, Thanksgiving, Easter and Halloween in the West and Lohri, Diwali and Holi in the East are celebrated as religious, social and seasonal days. The whole community participates in the celebrations, irrespective of one's religious denomination.

Diwali, in Northern India, is everybody's event. During that week, some people worship Ram, others worship Durga, Lakshmi, or Sarswati. Fireworks are shown at the Golden Temple, Amritsar, too, on this day. Everybody is in a cheerful mood; houses are cleaned, decorated and lighted.

In the same way, business people have made Christmas more a seasonal and social function than a celebration of the birth of Christ. (December 25 is not the birthday of Christ. He is believed to have been born sometime during August or September.) After watching the Christmas celebrations for many years, a large number of Christians have strongly disagreed with the way the event is celebrated. They say it has been changed into a social and commercial event, rather than a religious one. Religious aspects of many events have faded away and they are celebrated as community events by all people irrespective of their faith.

### **(b) New Year's Eve:**

The first or any other date of a month including the first month of the New Year, has no meaning for the Sikhs. Every day is a new day in the life of a Sikh. Celebrating *Sankrant*, *Pooranmasi* (full moon), *Amavas* (no moon), New Year's Eve or New Year's

Day as sacred days is contrary to the Sikh belief. (See chapter 1 - D Founding of the Faiths)

How can one decide that a particular day is a New Year's Day? A year means one complete revolution of the earth around the sun. There is no beginning and no end of the orbit. Therefore, any day, when it is presumed that the year begins, is an arbitrary day. Every day can be taken to be the beginning of the New Year. The Christian calendar starts from the first of January; the Chinese New Year starts in February; the Indian year starts in March (some people count it from April) etc. For the Muslims the new year starts with the rise of the new moon and consists of 354 days and not 365 days. Therefore, in relation to the Gregorian calendar, it shifts every year; hence, the seasons are not the same in the same Muslim month. A month which comes in winter would come in summer after some years. Where is the sanctity of the New Year Day, when nobody can tell when the New Year truly begins?

Sikhism has been found to be right and justified not to attach any religious significance to any such lunar or solar day. Unfortunately, because of the influence of the old thoughts of the majority community, the Sikhs also have started celebrating these days. The earlier they give them up, the better it would be to bring the greatness of the Sikh thought into the limelight and attract more people to Sikhism.

May it be mentioned here that Sunday is a sacred day for Christians, hence they go to their church. For Sikhs, it is a holiday (not a sacred day) which they utilize spending more time in the Gurdwara. In Saudi Arabia, Sikh gatherings are held on Fridays, that day

being a holiday there. Muslims go to their mosque that day because Friday is a sacred day for them. Similarly, a full moon, no moon, *Sankrant*, etc., are sacred days for Hindus, but they have no significance for the Sikhs. *Gurbani* says those who worship days of the week or dates of a month are idiots.

ਬਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ॥ Page 843

**5. Is it against our religion to have a drink of alcohol or is it bad only if you over drink and get drunk?**

Yes. Drinking alcohol even in small quantities to enjoy its effect is against the Sikh *Reht*. Alcoholic drinks are forbidden because of their ill effect on the mind and body. But there is no restriction against taking medicine or foods which may have minute quantities of alcohol in them. Most of the liquid medicines usually do have some kind of alcohol as a solvent. They are not prohibited for a Sikh. However, taking medicine with the intention of drinking alcohol is contrary to the Sikh belief.

It would be interesting to give here some quotations from *Gurbani*:

ਜਿਤੁ ਪੀਤੈ ਖਸਮੁ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਮਿਲੈ ਸਜਾਇ॥

ਝੂਠਾ ਮਦੁ ਮੂਲਿ ਨ ਪੀਚਈ ਜੇ ਕਾ ਪਾਰਿ ਵਸਾਇ॥ Page 554

One should strictly avoid alcohol by drinking of which one loses one's love for God and is punished in His Court.

ਸੁਰਸਰੀ ਸਲਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਾਰੁਨੀ ਰੇ ਸੰਤ ਜਨ ਕਰਤ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਨੰ॥ Page 1293

Good persons do not consume alcohol even if it is prepared by using Gangajal (sacred water of the Ganges).

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਕਿਆ ਮਦਿ ਛੂਛੈ ਭਾਉ ਧਰੇ॥ Page 360

One should 'drink' the nectar of His Name and not the useless alcohol. Drinking alcohol means losing the valuable life in gambling.

**6. Do you think the Sikh religion has helped the world the way that Guru Nanak Dev Ji supposed it would?**

**This is a very important key question to which Sikh leaders, rather the whole nation, must address.** Keeping in mind the mission of the Guru, they should develop a project to educate the world about his thoughts and his revelations. The mission of Guru Nanak Dev has been outlined in popular words by Bhai Gur Das, the scribe of the Adi Guru Granth Sahib. In his very first Var, he mentions the causes of human problems and conflicts. He then explains how Guru Nanak devoted his life to eradicate those conflicts and bring peace on this earth (Pauri 19-38).

The essence of the complete Var (though all is not related to the topic under discussion but the contents are interesting and helpful in general) is given at the end of this answer.

The message of Guru Nanak is that there is one God, one humanity, and one faith which mandates us to love God and His children. There is no physical place called Heaven or Hell. When one is drenched with love of God and sings His virtues, the person enjoys heavenly bliss. Suffering from lust, ego, anger, greed and other vices is being in Hell while living on this very earth. The mission of human life is not to get salvation or qualify for paradise but to realize God vibrating everywhere in the universe. Hatred is the cause

of violence and all other problems of man. We must give it up and treat everybody equally. *Sangat* and *Pangat* were founded to achieve this goal (see also Introduction of this book).

The responsibility now falls on the shoulders of the Sikhs, who know the message, to carry it to as many people as they can. This may be done by, i) believing as a Sikh, ii) appearing like a Sikh, and iii) living like a Sikh.

People hungry for peace are sure to find out the principles of the Sikh Faith as has already been done by many scholars (see chapter 1-D). Only God knows how and according to which time-table these truths will unfold themselves to the people. We have to perform our duty by living as Sikhs.

### Var 1 by Bhai Gurdas:

#### Salutation:

PAURI 1. I salute Guru Nanak Dev Ji who told me the truth, God's name, the magic word. My sincere love and devotion to Him Who removed all my illusions and problems in the world.

#### Creation:

2-4. To begin with there was nothingness (dark). God created matter, energy, and millions of kinds of lives; humans were given the top position. They were told to earn their living through hard, honest work and share their earnings with others. To achieve the goal of their lives they were to love God and live in peace with the whole of humanity. They were to guide others as well as to love God.

Creation is unlimited. Millions multiplied by millions and millions of times cannot take us even near the limits of creation. Vyas authored Vedas and Mohammed authored Koran. Innumerable people like them have been created by God.

5-14. According to Hindu scriptures, to begin with, people were honest and lived a simple life. With the passage of time virtues decreased and vices increased in them.

The six Shastras and yoga became the guidelines for the people in their own individual way. However, without the true guide, people could not realize the Truth.

15-16. During the four Yugas, the people suffered from ego and selfishness. Peace could not be obtained without God's name during any time.

### **Root cause of the problem:**

17-18. Without the sun (knowledge) people remained in the dark (ignorant of the truth). Hence they suffered from the sin of hatred for others. The hatred caused friction, which produced fire that burnt them in the same way as strong winds burn bamboo plants by rubbing them against each other. (Fire is ignited because of the heat of friction). Rather than loving the living people and the Creator, people worshipped the creation. Some worshipped stones (idols) and others worshipped tombs (graves). Some believed in magic and others believed in the sun, moon, earth, fire, etc. They were following useless pursuits.

19-21. Hatred, the root cause of all troubles, took birth when society was divided into four castes, considering some persons as high and others as low. Yogis and Sanyasis also split themselves into upper and lower divisions. Thus, they too, lost the truth. Mohammed further split people by adding another set of rituals to be practiced by his followers. They intensified the ill will among the two communities by demolishing Hindu temples and raising mosques in their place. In other words, sin prevailed everywhere. Muslims and Hindus put themselves into opposing camps. They stuck to the rituals of their faith but forsook the Truth.

### **Guru Nanak Deputed:**

22-23. Without the guide for Truth, there was darkness all around. The people, therefore, prayed to God to send a holy man to show them the light. Listening to the prayers of the people, God deputed Nanak to preach Truth.

24-26. With the blessings of God and devotion on his own part, Guru Nanak received the light of Truth. He saw the whole world



burning in the fire of ego and hatred. He decided to go around and tell people the Truth. Ignorant guides were misleading themselves and their followers by worshipping innumerable gods and devils instead of God.

27-31. When Guru Nanak, the Sun of Truth, rose, the pretenders vanished and the light of Truth spread everywhere. Guru Nanak convinced Yogis, Sidhs, and selfish religious leaders to seek Truth rather than miracles.

32-36. Guru Nanak went to the Middle East and had discussions with the Muslim leaders at Mecca, Medina, and Bagdad. **To answer their question who is superior, a Hindu or a Muslim, the Guru replied, "Only good, sincere deeds help a man to achieve peace. Without good deeds, whatever their faith, all will repent."**

37-38. After visiting all the major religious places and giving his message of one Father and one humanity, Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur (on the banks of the river Ravi).

39-44. He had discussions with the Sidhs at Batala and the Muslim holy men at Multan to give his message.

**Guruship continues:**

45-48. The Guruship passed on through Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev to Guru Hargobind. (Bhai Gurdas died during the period of Guru Hargobind)

49. Meditation on Waheguru helps one to realize the Master, God.

**7. What is the purpose of repeating *Paath* over and over again if you don't understand it?**

- **Is *Nam Simran* (saying Waheguru repeatedly) more important than reading *Gurbani*? Which one is more useful in our life and why?**

**(a) Reciting *Paath*:**

It is agreed by all that we should recite *Paath* regularly because that is a direction from the Gurus. In this, three steps are involved:

- i) reading (listening to) the message
- ii) understanding the message
- iii) benefiting from the message.

The first two steps are essential for the third. Hence, the beginning has to be made with reading. Obviously, reading alone without understanding and benefiting from the message is not of full use.

There are many other examples in life where we end at the first or the second step and we fail to take the third step, i.e., to obtain the full benefit. We know exercise is good for our health, but many of us don't do it regularly. Smoking is very harmful for our health but some people still continue to smoke. Stealing is both immoral and illegal. Knowing all this, some people still get themselves involved in stealing. Our failure to benefit from the message is mentioned in *Gurbani* like this:

ਕਬੀਰ ਮਨੁ ਜਾਨੈ ਸਭ ਬਾਤ ਜਾਨਤ ਹੀ ਅਉਗਨੁ ਕਰੈ॥

ਕਾਹੇ ਕੀ ਕੁਸਲਾਤ ਹਾਬਿ ਦੀਪੁ ਕੁਏ ਪਰੈ॥ 216 ॥ Page 1376

Our mind knows what is right and what is wrong but still it leads us to do wrong things. How can one be saved if the person himself chooses the wrong path?

*We should not feel discouraged that we cannot understand everything when we read Paath or because we cannot practice all what we do understand. We must make a start by reading and then try to move ahead steadily, maybe even slowly. Once we know the benefit of practicing the lessons of Gurbani, our mind will start to enjoy the recitation and benefit from it.*

People who have been reading Jap Ji for 50 years or more still find something new and fresh in it when their mind is tuned to it. The inner meanings of *Gurbani* are known only under that situation.

Reading *Gurbani* is a good habit and must be practiced regularly by making all efforts to understand it and adopt the message. It is beneficial in many other ways even if we do not understand it well and do not take full advantage of it.

Here are some reasons why *Gurbani* should be read daily:

i) *Gurbani* is written in poetic form. Its rhythm and sound waves have many positive effects. They cool our nerves and calm our mind in the same way as does music, which many of us also do not understand.

ii) Regular reading of *Gurbani* (*Nitnem*) forces a timely pause in the never-ending and never-slowng rat race we are running. All doctors now agree that we must sit calmly and quietly to meditate on something to take away our mind from the worldly tensions. This is essential to give a daily rest to our over-worked and over-heated nervous system. Reciting hymns regularly provides us this benefit. It keeps our minds safe from the tensions and pressures of living the high-tech modern life.

iii) This practice is a repeated reminder to us that our life has a purpose; being reminded of this every day is very important to keep our lives on the right track.

We are like children playing outside away from our Mother, God. When it is time for work, the mother

gives a call to the child, "Dear, now stop playing, come home, and finish your school-work in time." The call is first ignored by the children because they love to play (as we love worldly life). Repeated calls of the mother put pressure on the mind of the child to come home and do his school work. Regular sittings for doing *Nitnem* are repeated calls from the Mother, God, reminding us, "Dear, you have a responsibility towards yourself. Now is the time to attend to that. Don't get late anymore." In due course of time, the call will touch the heart of the reader and motivate him to recite *Gurbani* hymns devotedly and obtain peace.

iv) In the evenings, we usually chat over a cup of tea with our friends. Many times we carry on our meaningless talks endlessly. If someone says, "Let us recite *Rehras*; it is time to do it.", those who were wasting your time and theirs too, melt away. For those who stay, the meaningless social gathering becomes a sacred *Sangat*, i.e., solace giving, calm restoring and God-loving congregation.

v) The test of the pudding is in tasting. If a person recites *Gurbani* sincerely (even when he doesn't understand it fully, and most of us actually don't) he will notice a change in him to the better side. The feeling, "I do Paath, therefore, I should not do this bad thing." will become stronger and stronger, keeping him safe from all wrong acts. We know what is right and what is wrong, but we don't have the moral strength to keep a check on us. The regular reading of Paath provides us the necessary reasoning and the required strength to keep our mind under control.

vi) The very question, "What use is reading Paath if I don't understand it?" becomes very meaningful to a person who reads *Gurbani* regularly. One day it will awaken his soul and make him decide, "I must also know what I read." When he knows what he reads, he will start practicing it, making his own life happy and spreading happiness around him.

**(b) Nam Simran:**

'*Nam Simran*' means to remember, love, and meditate on God. There are many ways to do it. The formal method is to sit in a calm, quiet place, close your eyes, concentrate your mind on the virtues of God and utter *Waheguru* in your mind. The sound may be tuned with your breath to keep your mind fixed on the track.

There are also many informal methods such as reading *Gurbani*, doing *Sewa*, listening to *Kirtan*, etc. The idea is to keep in mind God and His virtues. The relative importance of these methods cannot be compared. All these activities are expected to be a regular part of the life of a Sikh to enjoy the full benefit of *Simran*.

*Nam Simran* is explained in a *Gurbani* hymn in question-answer form between two devotees.

ਨਾਮਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਿਆ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨੁ ਮੀਤ॥

ਕਾਹੇ ਛੀਪਹੁ ਛਾਇਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਨ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਚੀਤੁ॥ 212 ॥

ਨਾਮਾ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨਾ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਰਾਮੁ ਸੰਮੁਲਿ॥

ਹਾਥ ਪਾਉ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਮੁ ਸਭੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਨਾਲਿ॥ 213 ॥ Page 1375

Bhagat Tarlochan finding Bhagat Namdev busy in calico printing asked him, "You seem to be more interested in money than in God's Name. You remain busy printing sheets instead of meditat-

ing on God." Bhagat Namdev responded, "While the body is busy doing work one can keep his mind tuned in to the love of God."

In another hymn Bhagat Namdev refers to some daily experiences in life explaining how we keep our mind fixed in things with which we are deeply concerned and we love.

ਆਨੀਲੇ ਕਗਦੁ ਕਾਟੀਲੇ ਗੂਡੀ ਆਕਾਸ ਮਧੇ ਭਰਮੀਅਲੇ॥  
ਪੰਚ ਜਨਾ ਸਿਉ ਬਾਤ ਬਤਊਆ ਚੀਤੁ ਸੁ ਡੋਰੀ ਰਾਖੀਅਲੇ॥  
ਮਨੁ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਾ ਬੋਧੀਅਲੇ॥ ਜੈਸੇ ਕਨਿਕ ਕਲਾ ਚਿਤੁ ਮਾਡੀਅਲੇ॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥ ...  
ਕਹਤ ਨਾਮਦੇਉ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਤਿਲੋਚਨ ਬਾਲਕੁ ਪਾਲਨ ਪਉਢੀਅਲੇ॥  
ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਕਾਜ ਬਿਰੂਧੀ ਚੀਤੁ ਸੁ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਰਾਖੀਅਲੇ॥ Page 972

When the boys fly kites, they also enjoy their mutual conversation. While busy in their conversation, their minds always remain tuned to their kites. A mother, who has her child sleeping in the crib while busy in her daily house chores, keeps her mind all the time tuned to the baby. The same way a devotee should always keep himself tuned to the love of God while he is busy performing his routine worldly chores.

In a professional course, both theory and practice are necessary to learn the subject. Each has its own importance. In the same way, a Sikh must practice all the methods mentioned above depending upon his mood, time, situation, environment, and need.

The utility and benefit of regular *Nam Simran* can be understood from the following simple example. To live a happy and peaceful life, we need both body and mind in a healthy condition. Proper food is needed to keep the body healthy and strong. *Sewa* and *Simran* are needed to keep the mind free from vices. This is the way to keep your mind strong and direct your activities on the right path.

**8. In some *Gutkas*, why are the *Banis* and *Ardas* longer than normal?**

All *Gutkas* have the same length of *Banis* in them. It is only in the case of *Rehras* that a few *Gutkas* have a couple of additional *Shabads*. *Ardas* of course is different in different *Gutkas* because it was written by different persons. We should all follow the standard *Ardas* and *Rehras* written in the *Gutkas* printed by the Gurdwara committee, Amritsar and the Sikh Missionary College, Ludhiana.

Differences in *Rehras* have a history behind them. This *Bani* was originally known as *So-Dar*. The title *Rehras* however became popular later on, perhaps because of the line -- *Har Keerat Hamri Rehras* -- in the fourth *shabad*. The *Rehras* approved by the Khalsa Panth and mentioned in the Sikh *Reht Maryada* Tract and regularly read at Akal Takhat consists of:

a) i) *So-Dar* ii) *So-Purkh*. Nine *Shabads* in all as mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib before the start of *Ragas*.

b) *Chaupai* including *Swaya* and *Dohra* from *Dasam Granth*.

c) The *Rehras* is concluded by reading the first five and last *Pauri* of *Anand Sahib*, followed by the two last *Slokas* in the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Additions to the above prescribed *Paath* and reasons for them:**

In every Gurdwara people get together for the evening Diwan called *So-Dar* Diwan. Before starting the *So-Dar Bani* recitation, it was common (it is practiced at Akal Takhat and at many other Gurdwaras even now) to sing some *Shabads*. When the *Kirtan* starts, *Sangat* knows that it is time for *So-Dar* recitation. They gather there and listen to the *Kirtan* of the *Shabads* before the start of the *Rehras Paath*. This helps tuning their minds to *Gurbani*. At the fixed time the *Kirtan* is stopped and a Sikh recites the *Paath*.

Wherever *Kirtan* could not be sung in a Gurdwara, because of the non-availability of the *Ragis* there, the *Sangat* would jointly recite *Shabads* in rhythm. This would give Sikhs time to sit, settle and concentrate their minds before the start of reciting *Rehras*.

Later, when printing of *Gutkas* started, the *Shabads* commonly read by the *Sangat* were also printed along with the *Rehras*. This was to facilitate the correct singing of *Shabads* before starting the *Rehras*. However, having sung these *Shabads* over a long time, Sikhs mistakenly assumed the *Shabads* to be a part of *Rehras*. As different *Sangats* recited different *Shabads* to their liking, the contents and hence the length of the *Rehras* became different accordingly.

To remove this misunderstanding, the Sikh *Reht Maryada* expressly states that *Rehras Paath* starts from the *Shabad So-Dar* and ends at *Salok Mahala 5: Tera Keeta ...* Anything printed before *So-Dar* or after *Mahala 5* is not a part of *Rehras*.

Some Sikhs, however, made many more additions on their own after the *Chaupai*. The *Khalsa Panth*



have decided not to include any of them as a part of *Rehras*. They are not allowed to be read as a part of *Rehras*.

Even a little attention paid to the meaning of additional couplets chosen from *Avtar Kathas* easily proves that their reading as a part of *Rehras* is wrong. For example, one couplet tells that Vishnu devotees face no problems while the other couplet contradicts it saying that one should not pray to Vishnu, Krishan or other gods. Basically, the message of many of the added couplets is against the directions of *Gurbani*. They were picked up from the stories of Hindu *Avtars* included in a compilation now called *Dasam Granth*.

The *Gutkas* published by the Gurdwara Committee, Amritsar and other such organizations have the correct *Rehras Paath*. Only the *Gutkas* published by the private printers include extra *Shabads* after *Chaupai*. This is against the ruling of the *Reht Maryada*.

Instead of agreeing with the scholars and the orders of the Guru Khalsa Panth, some Sikhs argue that reading extra *Bani* is more beneficial. Hence, they think that they are "better" Sikhs than those who read the standard *Rehras*. One is welcome to read as many hymns as he wishes to but no individual has a right to make any additions to the approved *Rehras Paath*. It should be read as directed. Other *Banis* can be read whenever one wants, but not as a part of the *Rehras*.

## **(B) MARRIAGE**

### **(a) An institution**

Marriage is an institution, which allows a man and a woman to live as husband and wife. The functioning of this institution is based not only on religious principles, but also on social and moral values prevailing among the people. *As these values differ with different societies and different religions, the answers to many of the questions relating to dating and marriage will also differ. The proper answers will depend upon the community to which they are addressed.*

In some cases, not only dressing properly but also keeping a veil is obligatory for a woman. In others covering of just the vital parts of the body, as by a bathing suit, is considered enough dress for a lady to move in public. In some communities, adults with mutual consent can have sex without any eyebrows being raised while in others talking to a girl in a lonely place is considered an immoral act. In one society, shaking hands with a girl is considered undesirable whereas in another society necking and kissing in public is accepted to be normal behavior.

Marriage has many aspects such as legal, social, moral and religious. In different cases these aspects are involved to different degrees. In some cases religion can be ignored totally. The concerned persons can go to the court, fill out the forms, and get married without performing any religious ceremony. Marriage is sometimes defined as legally agreed, socially permitted, and religiously allowed sexual partnership.

According to the Sikh faith, marriage is a sacred union between husband and wife to achieve the goal of human life jointly with each other's help and de-

pendence. The two, the husband and the wife, seek to have one mind and one goal to be successful in their lives.

The goal of human life is to realize Truth (God). When seen from the angle of the Sikh faith, the spouse is a companion, a supporter, and a life partner to travel on that path. The mutual dependence, understanding, and interrelationship between the two is so strong that the husband and wife live as 'one' soul, i.e., they think and act as a unit. A Sikh, therefore, is to marry only a Sikh. The spouse may be of any color, caste, country, community, or race. A couple can achieve the goal of their lives with greater ease if both persons have the same faith. A spouse from the same community is preferred for easy and better mutual understanding. This has no reflection on other communities being inferior or superior. A Sikh can marry a person born in a non-Sikh family. However, it is to be assured before marriage, that the spouse has voluntarily decided to believe in Sikh faith and live like a Sikh.

### **(b) Interfaith Marriage**

Marriage between followers of two different faiths cannot move smoothly. **It can be celebrated but not practiced.** A person cannot walk on two different paths simultaneously. The same way, one cannot have two faiths at the same time. Faith is not just a philosophy to be learnt but a path to be followed. Respecting a person of another faith is totally different than living with that person as a spouse.

To explain the above, we can have an example from our social life. A person cannot be a member of two different political parties at the same time. If one joins another party, one automatically loses the membership of his/her previous party.

How can a marriage between members of two different faiths take even a start in their life when loyalty and sincerity are essential conditions of every faith. As a visitor, one can go to a temple, a Gurdwara, a church or a mosque, but one must decide where one belongs to. One can marry a person born in any faith, but before marriage they ought to decide which faith they want to follow.

Marriage, in addition to the living of the partners together as one soul, also involves raising children. If the partners in marriage do not have the same faith, the children will find it difficult to choose the path of their life. It can be argued that the children can be taught about both the faiths. When they become adults, they themselves may choose the faith they want to follow. Well, we can indulge in wishful thinking, but in practice it involves real problems. Faith is not like a profession that one can choose later. One has to learn and understand it by living as a faithful.

The Sikh view as given above is also echoed by other religious communities. The following news cited up from the Free Lance Star, Virginia, USA, December 9, 1989, tells us what others think of mixed marriages.

*ONE FAITH BEST FOR CHILD, PANELISTS SAY*

*Children of Christian-Jewish marriages are psychologically healthier if raised in the religion of one of the parents than in both faiths or none, a panel of experts indicated here.*

*Lydia Kukoff of Los Angeles, a Reform Jewish specialist, said reluctance of interfaith couples to choose one faith for their child, or their decision to let the child decide later "masks a dangerous ambivalence."*

As mentioned earlier, marriage involves not only the religious aspect but also the social and legal aspects. As most of the questions asked involve non-religious aspects of the marriage, they need to be answered in a separate booklet.

It must be mentioned here that according to the Sikh faith a sexual relationship with unwed partners is considered a sin. Anyone who commits this act is considered fallen out of the Sikh faith. Experience has shown that to begin with, a partner may be more attractive than the faith; however, soon the faith becomes more important than the partner. In that case, the spouses may find themselves in real trouble. It is always desired that a non-Sikh spouse lives the life of a Sikh before marrying a Sikh. This helps to assure that he or she is well versed in the basic principles and the practices of the Sikh faith to enjoy one's life with a Sikh spouse.

The celebration of the Sikh marriage is described in the Sikh *Reht Maryada* bulletin published by the Shiromani Committee Amritsar. The reader may refer to the bulletin for details.

## (C) REINCARNATION

**9. Is the dead body of a Sikh to be cremated or buried? What happens to it?**

Sikhism does not restrict the way in which a dead body may be disposed of. People may bury the body, throw it in water, cremate it, or treat it in any convenient but respectful way. **None of these methods helps or harms the soul in any manner.** The soul remains unaffected by any treatment to the body. Sikhs generally cremate the dead body just because it is a convenient way to dispose of the corpse. They do not do so because it will help the soul go to Heaven. In contrast, other religions believe that the disposal of a dead body is a religious act and that the dead body has to be treated in the way prescribed by their religion. Muslims and many Christians bury the dead body, burning it is against their faith. Hindus generally cremate their dead or deliver their bodies to some sacred river or sea.

**10. If we believe in re-incarnation, were the Gurus re-born? How do we know people have a previous life form?**

It does not matter, whether it was the first stage of the cycle, or the Gurus and Bhagats had earlier undergone some cycles of re-incarnation. We are concerned with what lessons of life they gave to us through their teaching, preaching, and living.

Existence of the soul and the cycle of birth and death has been reported by the scientists. If somebody wants to see the details he is welcome to read "Unto the Unknown" by the Reader's Digest publications, "Life after Life" by Raymond A. Moody, JR. M.D. and

other books on the subject. They have mentioned many documented cases of the soul going out of the body and getting back into the same body or taking a new birth. A couple of such documented incidents are reported in the newspapers almost every year.

### **11. What is the Sikhs' version of Heaven and Hell?**

According to the Sikh faith, there is no place which has been reserved as Heaven or as Hell. In the following hymn, *Gurmat* says living in love with God is living in Heaven and living by ignoring God is living in Hell on this very earth.

ਕਬੀਰ ਆਸਾ ਕਰੀਐ ਰਾਮ ਕੀ ਅਵਰੈ ਆਸ ਨਿਰਾਸ॥

ਨਰਕਿ ਪਰਹਿ ਤੇ ਮਾਨਈ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਉਦਾਸ॥ 95 ॥ Page 1369

ਤਹਾ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਜਹ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੂੰ ਆਪੇ ਸਰਧਾ ਲਾਇਹਿ॥ Page 749

### **12. If a person does something good or bad in this life, why does God wait to punish or reward him in his next life?**

Sometimes, it appears to us that people doing illegal and antisocial acts enjoy their life and they are not punished or controlled by God. Actually such persons receive their punishment without other people knowing it. Our knowledge is limited to the legal methods of punishment, being put in jail, or being fined by a judge.

The methods of God for rewards and punishment are different. They are all automatic and built in nature. Having done something wrong, a person is always worried lest the people find him to be a liar, a

cheat, a robber, etc. Therefore, he remains under mental torture all the time. Even with a good house, good food, and all the comforts of life, he cannot have peace or solace. Fear of being exposed haunts him and bothers him for his entire life. This is a much bigger punishment than the one given by legal courts such as paying a fine or going to jail. One may not get exposed publicly, but at least within his close group of friends, people know the truth about him and he lives the life of a degraded person. An evil person lives all his life like that, even though he is not physically in jail. Because of his anti-social or immoral behavior, he remains under mental imprisonment.

To explain the self-inflicted punishment one gives to himself or herself, the mention of an actual happening will be helpful. Friends of a very high Indian government officer thought he was enjoying his life as best as anyone could. He got huge bribes from people and spent the money drinking, dancing, and sleeping with women. He ignored his wife and children. The wife, having failed to restrain him from women and wine, reported the matter to the government regarding his taking of bribes from the people. When the government charged him, his illegal and immoral crimes became public. He was so scared to face his friends, that he jumped from his office window to his death.

People doing evil acts punish themselves more severely than a government can. Some, as stated above, even commit suicide and lose the gift of life given by God. Furthermore, unless one gives up evil acts from his mind, these bad thoughts go with him to his next life and they punish him there too.



The punishment that people receive here or after their death is not given by God. We get rewarded or punished ourselves as a matter of the consequences of our doings. If you don't watch your feet and stumble on a rock, it is not the fault of the rock nor of God. When a driver takes his mind away from the wheel and meets with an accident, it is not the government which is punishing him; he has invited punishment himself. Our immoral and antisocial acts committed under lust, anger, greed, etc., lead us on the wrong path. As a result, we suffer from physical and mental torture.

## Chapter III

# **AMRIT AND FIVE SYMBOLS**

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1. **Guru Gobind Singh gave one *Amrit*. Now, we have so many *Amrits* - Akal Takhat *Amrit*, Sant *Amrit*, Jatha *Amrit*, etc. Why is there such a conflict about what an *Amritdhari* should do or should not do?**
- **Some say it is okay to eat meat while others say it is totally wrong. Some say all meats are okay except beef.**
  - **If a lady takes *Amrit* she must tie a turban. Why?**

### ***Amrit Reht***

(i) The Guru gave one *Amrit* and one *Maryada*, then why are there so many *Amrits* today? This is rightly a big question in the minds of all Sikhs. We

know the reason for there being so many *Maryadas*, but we don't know how to convince these different groups to accept the approved *Maryada* as the one given by the Guru.

The Guru authorized the *Panj Pyaras* to give *Amrit* to anyone desirous of joining the Khalsa Panth. Thousands joined this brotherhood on Baisakhi Day of 1699 after the founding of the Khalsa Panth. When these Singhs came to their villages they started giving *Amrit* to more people. They passed on the code of the *Reht Maryada* verbally to the new members of the Khalsa. This procedure is still going on today. During the *Amrit* ceremony, the candidates for *Amrit* do not take a paper and pen to record all what is told to them. They listen to it, remember it and try to practice it in their lives.

When *Amritdhari* Sikhs explained the *Maryada* to the new members, they did contribute, unintentionally of course, some variations in the instructions. It is now a known social phenomenon that when one hears a message and passes it on to another person, it is impossible to convey the message in the same spirit. He cannot help giving his own interpretation to the message, because of which the message may sometimes be totally changed. This happens even when one takes all precautions to communicate the message correctly without adding or deleting anything from it. It is easy to imagine the changes which could take place in the *Maryada* when there is a desire to make the *Maryada* "better and holier" than the one practiced by other Sikhs.

(ii) We do not have a complete set of systematically written directions regarding *Reht* from the Guru. Of course, many Sikhs, some contemporaries of the Guru and others descendent of those who attended the Guru, have written their observations and instructions regarding the *Reht* to be practiced by the Khalsa. When all these writings are put together, not only do they not agree, but some observations contradict each other. In a few cases, the instructions go against the principles of *Gurmat* (*Gurbani* in Guru Granth Sahib). Sikh scholars, therefore, fear that some sections of the *Reht Namas* were not written by the persons whose names are associated with those writings. They must have been modified later on.

(iii) During the 18th century, the Khalsa were always harassed by the government. They had to leave their Gurdwaras and move to the woods for protection from the police and army. This situation prevailed for more than half a century. During this time, the Sehjdharis (without long hair) were in charge of the Gurdwaras. Later, the Gurdwara management slipped into the hands of Mahants, who became hereditary custodians of the Gurdwaras. Because of the Hindu environment and Brahmanical influence, they introduced many Hindu rituals in the Gurdwaras. During the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh no effort was made to crystallize the Sikh *Reht* from the mixture of Hindu rituals.

(iv) It was during the British rule that Sikhs, having lost all political power, thought of their religious

principles to get guidance for their future. The Gurdwara management under the Mahants had so much deteriorated during the previous 100 years that the Mahants had become corrupt and started leading immoral lives. To increase their income they introduced worship of Hindu gods in the Gurdwaras, an act strictly prohibited for the Sikhs. There was no discipline, and women visiting the Gurdwaras were often harassed or even molested. This irreligious and immoral behavior of the Mahants gave birth to the Gurdwara Reform Movement.

The intellectuals, the Sikh scholars, and the Sikh *Sants* supported the movement. They all got together to protest the antiSikh and nonSikh rituals forced on them by the Mahants managing the Gurdwaras. For political reasons, the Government supported the Mahants in order to keep the Sikhs away from the control of the Gurdwaras. After enduring a long struggle and paying a heavy price in the form of blood and money, the Sikhs won control of their Gurdwaras in 1925. **The first and one of the best actions they took was to appoint a committee to decide and put in writing the Sikh *Reht Maryada* to be followed by all Sikhs.** The committee worked for many years, and sifted through all the available scriptures and writings of the times of Guru Gobind Singh. They finally presented the results of their research to the Sikh community. After receiving comments from all sections of the Sikh community, the final form of the Sikh *Reht Maryada* was approved and published by the Gurdwara Committee, Amritsar.

**It is this booklet which we should popularize and follow, even if we, individually, have different opinions.** If a Sikh wants a change in it, the best course for him is to present his suggestions with logical arguments and authenticated evidence to the Khalsa Panth for consideration.

(v) It must be mentioned here that interference in the Sikh faith by certain forces against Sikhs and Sikhism is always widespread. Concerted efforts are often made by these forces to confuse the issues more, rather than let them to be decided by Sikh scholars. The Nirankari Sect, practicing anti-Sikh *Reht*, but claiming themselves to be Sikhs, are supported and helped by the political enemies of the Sikhs. These false Nirankaris disrespect the Guru Granth Sahib publicly and criticize the *Reht* in their writings and speeches. Sikhs have protested against this strongly. The government in power, rather than stopping Nirankaris from hurting the Sikh feelings, sided with them, resulting in the 1978 episode and later genocide of the Sikhs in 1984. There are many other anti-Sikh splinter groups sponsored and supported by the government to mislead the Sikhs.

There are, however, many genuine Sikhs who want certain changes/additions in the Sikh *Reht Maryada* booklet. The suggestion to such Sikhs is that they observe the *Maryada* already prescribed by the Gurdwara Committee, Amritsar, and hold on to it for the present for the sake of Panthic unity. This is not the proper time for making changes and asserting individual thoughts on the Khalsa Panth. Let the Khalsa

first resolve the current life and death struggle before this topic is put on the agenda.

## Eating Meat

According to the *Maryada* booklet '*Kutha*', the meat prepared by the Muslim ritual is prohibited for a Sikh. Regarding eating other meat, it is silent. From the prohibition of the *Kutha* meat, it is presumed, that non*Kutha* meat is not prohibited for the Sikhs.

Of course, beef is prohibited to the Hindus and pork to the Muslims. Jews and Christians have their own restrictions. They may not eat certain kinds of meat on certain days. Sikhs have no such instructions. If one thinks he needs to eat meat, it does not matter which meat it is, beef, pork, poultry, fish, etc., or which day it is. Of course, one should be careful not to eat any meat or other foods harmful to one's health.

*Gurbani's* instructions on this topic are very clear.

ਮਾਸੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਝਗੜੇ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਣੈ॥

ਕਉਣੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਉਣੁ ਸਾਗੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ਕਿਸੁ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਪ ਸਮਾਣੈ॥ page 1289

Only a fool argues whether to eat meat or not. Who can define what is meat and what is not meat? Who knows where the sin lies, being a vegetarian or a nonvegetarian?

The Brahmanical thought that a religious person should be a vegetarian is of recent origin. Earlier, Brahmans had been eating beef and horse meat after sacrificing the animal in the name of the goddess.

In conclusion, it is not correct to say that any person who eats meat (of course *Kutha*, because of the Muslim rituals is prohibited) loses his membership

of the Khalsa and becomes an apostate. Traditionally, however, eating meat by the Sikhs is not encouraged. (See also Chapter V B Langar).

## **Turban**

It is required of every Sikh to keep his/her head always covered. Males do so by tying a turban while most of the females keep a big scarf (chuni) to cover their heads and upper part of the body. Women who tie a turban (*keski*) are not infringing on any *Reht*; rather this is quite convenient and looks more graceful. Furthermore, by tying a *Keski*, the hair remain properly covered all the time. Scarves often keep coming off and the women are observed, even while sitting in Gurdwara, trying to keep it on their heads again and again. (See also Chapter IX Question 6).

### **2. If a Sikh took *Amrit* and lied later, is he a Khalsa or not?**

It is like asking whether a person is an American or not if he/she did something which is against the constitution. We know he remains an American but as a criminal or a guilty person depending upon the actions he did. Lying is a kind of cheating through words, which is an un-Sikh like act. A Sikh is not expected to tell a lie. Lying is sinful for every person, whether a Sikh or not.

Life involves many aspects of our activities. Think of a student who has to learn many subjects and practice sports. One student may be good in studies



and poor in sports, while the other may be good in sports but poor in studies. We recognize students by their total achievements. Similarly, a Sikh may be good in one aspect of life, but not in others. *Gurmat* says

ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ਗੁਣਹ ਕੇਰੀ ਛੋਡਿ ਅਵਗਣ ਚਲੀਐ॥ Page 766

Instead of finding faults with others and requiring them to live a pious life, let us look for virtues in the people and try to live a virtuous life ourselves.

**3. How are *Amritdharis* different from those Sikhs who live by Guru Granth Sahib, but do not wear the 5 symbols? How are they different from those people who serve humanity as a Khalsa is supposed to do?**

- **Who is a better Sikh: he who is an *Amritdhari*, keeps 5 symbols and reads all *Paath* regularly, but does not live honestly; OR he who is not *Amritshak*, not wearing the 5 symbols, but lives a truthful life as a Sikh is supposed to live?**
- **Why do people become *Amritshak* even though they know they are not going to go on the right path? I see people doing wrong things while they are *Amritdhari* Sikhs.**

### ***Amritdhari* and Others**

The principle involved in this case is similar to the one mentioned in the second question above. *Amritdharis* are different from non-*Amritdharis*, who live by

the Guru Granth Sahib, in the same way as a soldier or a policeman of a country is different from a good law-abiding, high-class citizen. Both serve their country in their own way. A veteran enjoys greater respect from the people and the government of the state because of his duty to protect their freedom at the risk of his/her life.

The Khalsa is a soldier, not of any worldly government but of God, for serving people and protecting their human rights. They do so not because they are to be paid for their services, but because it is their duty to serve humanity. The physical distinction of wearing the 5-symbol uniform by a Khalsa is the same as a policeman wearing his uniform and looking different from other citizens of the state.

Non-Amritdharis (without the 5 symbols) living the life of an *Amritdhari* Sikh, are like the civilians doing the duty of a policeman. They do so without joining the police department, without putting on their uniform, and without observing the code of discipline required of the policemen. ***Such people, even when doing better services than the policemen, are not recognized as policemen, but as good citizens.*** A person living a pious life as expected of a Sikh will be recognized as a holy man, but not as a member of the Khalsa, unless he wears the 5-symbol uniform and observes other codes of the *Reht*.

## **Better Sikh?**

This actually is the same question as above but asked in different words by another youth. The answer

can be understood easily if we relate it to our daily life. Who is a better member of the team one who wears a uniform, but does not play the game, or the one who does not wear the uniform, but plays the game well? Each is deficient; one needs to learn how to play and the other needs to wear the uniform to become a member of the team. The two cannot be brought on the same level for comparison.

Similarly, we can say one is a Sikh by appearance but not by actions, while the other is a Sikh by actions but not by appearance. To be accepted and honored as a member of the team (Khalsa Panth), one has to know how to play (do good deeds), wear his 5-symbol uniform and obey the rules of the game (observe the Khalsa *Reht*).

### **Baptism (*Amrit*), Why?**

This is not a question but an observation of a person who feels hurt to see *Amritdhari* Sikhs ignoring their vows. People may agree with it or not. The general image among the Sikhs today is that during the 18th century Sikhs had very high character. They offered their heads for their religious freedom and human rights. They would die, but not lie. The Sikh youth, after learning the Sikh way of life, wish and decide to sincerely follow that path. However, today they do not see many Sikhs living up to those standards. Rather, they see them fighting for taking over the control of Gurdwaras instead of serving the Sikhs and living the life of a Sikh.

If we see with a wider perspective, we find many Sikhs who are making the highest sacrifices and suffering tortures even today to protect their religious freedom and human rights. Thousands have already become martyrs in the last decade. The history of the 18th century and early 20th century is being repeated today. There are people who have even sold their houses to help the Sikhs struggling against the mighty Indian government. Many are silently leading a good Sikh life and helping needy people. It is ironic that a few hundred Sikhs fighting for positions in the Gurdwara management become more prominent than hundreds of thousands of Sikhs who go there for religious singing and learning the principles of Sikh life.

**4. Why is a non*Amritdhari* considered inferior to an *Amritdhari* (not allowed to eat from the same plate) when you say that we are all equal?**

Normal practice of the Langar is that it is served equally to all, without discrimination of whether one is *Amritdhari* or a non*Amritdhari*. Everybody eats in his own plate. All sit as equals and are given the same food. If you and your brother are eating from the same plate, it does not mean that you consider other persons not permitted to eat from your plate, as inferior persons. In the same way, when two *Amritdharis* (Khalsa is one brotherhood) eat from the same plate, it is no reflection on the status or life of a non*Amritdhari*.

**5. Is it acceptable for a girl to shave her legs and underarms if she does not cut the hair on her head?**

No. A Sikh is required not to cut or shave hair from any part of the body. Trimming or shaving of eye brows by Sikh women is as much against the *Khalsa Reht* as trimming beard by Sikh men.

**6. Why do we have to have long hair? My dad said, "When the Sikhs were living in the forests, they could not get their hair cut, but now you can do it." Why can't we?**

If one wants to be accepted and recognized as a Sikh, keeping uncut hair is a requirement for that. When Guru Gobind Singh gave *Amrit* to the Sikhs, he also required them to wear the 5-symbol uniform. The Sikhs were living a very good life at that time in villages and cities. They were not living in forests. The Guru was living at Anandpur Sahib and was accepted as a true king. It is wrong to assume that Sikhs had to grow long hair because they could not cut it while living in jungles.

**7. How do we answer this question, "If you keep long hair, being God-given, why cut your nails which are also God-given?"**

You have been told the wrong reason by someone for keeping your hair uncut. Sikhs keep long hair, not because they are a gift of God, but because of the

order of the Guru. The instructions of the Guru to retain natural hair (not to cut it at all) are misinterpreted by some persons to mean that we are to keep hair uncut, it being a gift of nature, Waheguru, to human beings. This misunderstanding prevails among many Sikhs.

**8. You told us that keeping uncut hair is an essential requirement for a Sikh. Then why do Sikhs advertise "Wanted a clean-shaven Sikh" in matrimonial columns?**

This is a very common question asked at Sikh youth camps. To present this issue in proper perspective, the discussion is reproduced below in full detail.

**(a) The Question:**

A simple question, "Is it O.K. if a Sikh cuts his hair?" was asked by a trainee at a Sikh Youth Camp. My quick response was, "Nahin (no), hair is the identity of a Sikh." His immediate second question put me in a spot, "Then why do people advertise: *Wanted match for a clean-shaven Sikh?*"

"Um...u...m...h.." Before I could answer this question, the boy continued, "Anyway what has long hair to do with the faith of a person? One can be honest, truthful, and religious without keeping long hair." To my relief, a bearded European with long hanging hair passed by us. Pointing towards him, I asked the youth, "Is he a Sikh?" The answer was a quick and firm "No". I continued, "You mean that just keeping long hair does not make a person Sikh. Probably, this is your argument." The boy agreed with me. Now, the

question before us was, "If keeping long hair does not make one a Sikh, then who is a Sikh and why should a Sikh keep long hair?" We had a frank dialogue; below is the outcome of that.

**(b) Search for the Answer:**

(i) **The faith:** The Sikh faith was founded when Guru Nanak, coming out of the river, told people, "Na Koi Hindu, Na Musalman." He implied that God does not judge people as Hindus or Muslims or anyone else. Before Him, we all are simple human beings and equal. The people, Hindu or Muslim, high caste or low caste, who accepted his preaching and lived accordingly were called Nanak's "*sikhs*" (note the letter "s" is not capitalized). The word "*sikh*" is a common noun and it means a disciple, a follower. Nanak, having revealed a new philosophy, became popular as Guru.

The perception of the word Sikh, a member of a new community, which exists today, had not developed then. A "*sikh*" (follower) of the Guru, continued to be considered a member of his community, Hindu or Muslim. Bhai Mardana and Rai Bular were Muslims. Baba Budha was a Hindu, and Bhai Lalo was a low caste, but they were all "*sikhs*", disciples of the Guru. The folk saying: "*Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu Ka Guru, Musalman Ka Pir*" became popular wherever Guru Nanak went. Both communities joined the congregation to listen to Guru Nanak. A Hindu raja of Kangra became a "*sikh*", a disciple of Guru Amar Das, and supplied timber for building the town of Goindwal. Mian Mir, a Muslim holy man, was a "*sikh*" of

Guru Arjan Dev. Painsa Khan, a general of Guru Hargobind, was a Muslim.

As Guru Nanak kept long hair, his disciples, "*sikhs*", also started keeping long hair and wearing turbans as their identity. May it be mentioned here that some Hindus, particularly holy people, already kept their hair long and tied turbans, even before Guru Nanak was born. Muslims tied turbans in their own style. **The custom of keeping long hair and wearing turbans was not founded by Guru Nanak; this was a part of the world culture.** Europeans also tied turbans and this is mentioned in the Bible as a religious requirement for the Jews while praying.

(ii) **The Sikhs, a new community:** In 1699, Guru Gobind Rai founded a new community called the Khalsa Panth, which came to be known as the Sikh Panth or more often, simply the Sikhs. To be a Sikh, a member of the Panth, all "*sikhs*", even the Guru himself, had to take *Amrit*, adopt the 5K uniform, have a new surname (Singh for male, Kaur for female) and agree to follow a prescribed code of conduct, the Khalsa *Reht*.

The Guru introduced the **Nash** (to destroy, to get rid of) **doctrine** for the Sikhs. Anyone who wanted to be a Sikh had to give up his previous faith (Dharam Nash) and his caste (Kul Nash). Taking *Amrit* and adopting a new surname symbolized a new birth in the house of the Guru. The Sikhs could no more be members of their old communities. As both words, "*sikh*" and "Sikh", in Panjabi are written the same



way, the word *Singh* was used for the Sikhs to identify them from the "*sikhs*", the disciples.

Not all the "*sikhs*", believers in the *Gurmat* philosophy, became Sikhs, members of the Panth. According to the intelligence reporter of the Mughal court, who was deputed to cover the 1699 Baisakhi function, about 20,000 "*sikhs*" (the numbers differ with different historians) joined the Khalsa Panth and thus became Sikhs, the members of the new community. Now, there were three communities, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. These *Amritdhari* Sikhs were honored as the Guru Khalsa Panth and the Guruship was passed on to them as *Panj Pyaras*.

**Deciding not to join the Khalsa Panth did not mean the "*sikhs*", the disciples, were no longer good persons, an impression which some Sikhs mistakenly express about them today.** Such "*sikhs*" were called *Sehjdharis*, slow adopters; they were welcome to take time before they formally joined the Panth. Now, they are better known as "*Shardaloos*", believers of the Sikh faith. Being disciples of the Guru and followers of *Gurmat*, they were wellwishers and supporters of the Guru Khalsa Panth. They always sided with the Panth and suffered with them.

### **(c) The Answer**

The above historical review gives us the answer to the question, "Who is a Sikh?" A person who believes in *Gurmat* takes *Amrit*, wears the 5K uniform and follows the *Reht* becomes a Sikh. Otherwise, a

believer in *Gurmat* is a *Sehjdhari*, a "*sikh*", (but not a Sikh), a person on his way to taking *Amrit*, becoming a Sikh and thus being a full and visible member of the Sikh Panth.

**"Sehjdhari Sikh" is a contradiction in terms.**

*Having become a Sikh, one is no more a Sehjdhari. In the other case, "Sehjdhari sikh" the word "sikh" is redundant because Sehjdhari means a "sikh" moving on the path to be a Sikh (Singh).*

**Sehjdharis are wellwishers, supporters, and helpers of the Panth, and they have to be respected as such. It is no favor to them, they deserve it and it is an obligation for the Sikhs to treat them that way.**

Let us understand this by an example. During the British Raj, the Indian Congress party ordered its members to wear *khadi*, homespun cloth, and reject the British manufactured cloth as part of their noncooperation movement. Almost all Indians supported this order but many of them (some were getting favors from the British Government, some were not committed enough) did not want to express it publicly. *These sympathizers did not wear khadi to formally join the Congress. They, therefore, could not be given any office of the party.* However, their advice was listened to by the Congress party because of their moral, social, and economic support to the party and its goal. They were accepted as believers of the principles of the Congress philosophy even though they were not its visible members (did not wear *khadi*).

Sehjdharis have an analogous status in the Panth. Even though they are not visible (*Keshadhar*) members of the Panth, they play a very important and vital role in the Panthic affairs. They have their belief in *Gurmat*, their close relationship with the Sikhs, and their moral, social, and financial support to the Panth. In short, they are the wellwishers of the Panth.

There is another common example to explain the status of the Sehjdharis in the Panth. Many persons from all over the world have moved into the USA and have become resident-alien. They are considered Americans for all purposes but they cannot vote (take part in the political process) because of not having become citizens by taking the oath of loyalty to the nation. As a resident-alien needs to take an oath to claim membership of the country, a Sehjdhari (a resident of the Sikh community) needs to take *Amrit* (oath) to be a member (citizen) of the Panth before he can participate in the decision making process (voting and becoming a member of the Sikh institutions/Gurdwaras) of the Panth.

It should again be mentioned here, as observed in the very beginning, that keeping long hair and tying a turban alone does not make one a member of the Panth. It is both the faith and the practice of the *Reht* which make one a Sikh. Those who do not believe in Guru Gobind Singh and the *Amrit* ceremony founded by him are not Sikhs, members of his Panth.

**Radha Swamis, false Nirankaris, communists, and others who do not believe in *Amrit*, even if they keep hair and tie turbans, are not**

**Sikhs.** They are not even Sehjdharis because they do not believe in *Gurmat* preached by Guru Nanak (though they may claim so). They believe in another faith and they practice what was rejected by the Guru. One cannot be a member of two faiths at the same time, for example, a Hindu and a Muslim, a Sikh and a Hindu, or a Sikh and a Radha Swami.

According to the Sikh faith, as already stated, it does not matter in the court of the Lord, whether one is a Sikh, a Sehjdhari, a Muslim, a Hindu, or some one else. People are judged only by the deeds they do. Being an *Amritdhari* is the honor of being a member of the Panth, but is not a certificate to be used as a passport to Heavens (anyway, Sikhs do not believe in places like Heaven or Hell.) Neither being a Sehjdhari, or for that matter, a member of any other faith is a disqualification for realizing Truth. Baba Farid, Bhagat *Nam Dev*, and many other holy persons whose hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib, are examples before us.

#### **(d) Another question**

At the close of the discussion, a new question cropped up. Were the Bhagats, whose *Bani* is given in the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs or not? They did not take *Amrit*.

To find the answer, one must understand that the words "*guru*" and "*sikh*" were in use much earlier than the time of Guru Nanak Dev. They meant a teacher (guide) and a disciple, respectively. The former word "*guru*" is now accepted in the English lan-

guage and included in the dictionary with the above meaning. **Kabir and Sen are mentioned as "sikhs" by the famous scholar, Bhai Gurdas.** Var 10 - 16.

ਸੁਣਿ ਪਰਤਾਪ ਕਬੀਰ ਦਾ ਦੂਜਾ ਸਿਖ ਹੋਆ ਸੈਣ ਨਾਈ॥

Kabir was the first disciple, a "sikh" of "guru" Rama Nand (Note that Rama Nand was a "guru" not a Guru). Motivated by the honorable status obtained by Kabir, another holy person, Sen, a barber, also became his "sikh", a disciple.

There were (and also are today) many "gurus" and innumerable "sikhs", disciples, of their respective "gurus". However, the word Guru and Sikh have a specific meaning in the Sikh faith. The Guru means one of the ten Gurus and the Sikh means a member of the Sikh Panth, not just any disciple. Kabir, Nam Dev, Sen, and others were "sikhs", disciples but not Sikhs, members of the Khalsa Panth, which was founded by Guru Gobind Singh much later in 1699.

#### (e) The controversial Issue:

One of the trainees at the camp, feeling satisfied with the above dialogue, brought another controversial issue which he found causing lots of problems in the Sikh Community. He wanted to know the position of the Sehjdhari (without turban) and *Keshadhari* Sikhs (with turban) regarding Gurdwara management. The analysis led us to the following:

As only a citizen (not a resident-alien) of a country can vote, and as only a person who has joined the party can be its office bearer, so only a Sikh (not a Sehjdhari) is entitled to be an office bearer of the Sikh institutions and Gurdwaras. Sehjdharis, of

course, should be consulted, their views duly weighed, and they should be associated in the management of the Sikh institutions. Sikh *Reht Maryada* requires every devotee to be a Sikh to perform as a *Granthi*, *Ragi*, or *Parcharak* of the Sikh faith. Every *Sehjdhari* should be welcome to become an office bearer but only after joining the Sikh Panth by taking *Amrit*.

*If a Sehjdhari lays his claim to be a Sikh and thus feels entitled to become a preacher (Granthi, Ragi, Dhadi, Kathakar) or the president of a Gurdwara, then questions such as, "Why should a Sikh keep long hair?" and "what does a clean-shaven Sikh mean?" will continue to arise and will remain unanswered.*

**Further, when Sikhs hear in the prayer,**

"ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਸਿੰਘਣੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਧਰਮ ਹੇਤ ਸੀਸ ਦਿਤੇ, ਬੰਦ ਬੰਦ ਕਟਵਾਏ, ... ਧਰਮ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਾਰਿਆ ਸਿਖੀ ਕੇਸਾਂ ਸੁਆਸਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਨਿਬਾਹੀ॥"

"Those who sacrificed their heads, got themselves cut joint by joint ... but lived their faith along **with their uncut hair.**"

**they would wonder, why did the Sikhs suffer so much and sacrifice their lives for living with uncut hair?**

## **9. What are the five symbols for?**

(i) The 5 symbols of the Khalsa have the same value as the uniform of a policeman or a soldier and

something more subtle than that. This means equality, uniformity, unity, and identity of the wearers. Every member of a team is required to put on a certain prescribed uniform for this very purpose. In the same way a Sikh has to wear the 5 symbols being a member of the Khalsa team, a *SantSipahi*. Every team member is proud of his uniform, particularly if the team has won most of the matches and has lost only a few. *Here is the Khalsa team whose "coaches", "captains", and "players" played extremely well the "sport" of protecting the helpless people from the sword of the tyrannical rulers. Their victories have shaken the world and their successes have no parallel. That's why the Khalsa can justifiably feel proud of their uniform.* This is what Cliff R. Huthins, an Englishman who adopted the Sikh faith, meant when he said, ***"Is it not enough that people call me the son of Guru Gobind Singh just because I wear the five kakaars (5K symbols)?"***

There is another way of explaining the significance of this Khalsa *Reht*. In a Sikh youth camp, pointing towards a nonSikh press reporter, the author asked the students, "If he wears Sikh symbols, will he become a Sikh?" The quick and unanimous response "no" showed their understanding of the basic importance of the Sikh symbols. It is not the physical utility of wearing the Sikh symbols that makes the person a Sikh, it is the philosophy behind their wearing and his becoming a member of the Khalsa Panth, the son of Guru Gobind Singh, that gives the person the pride of being a Sikh. The five symbols connect us to that philosophy.

The wearing of the Khalsa uniform has many physical advantages too, but that is not the primary reason we wear the uniform. These advantages may be considered as a bonus of the Khalsa uniform but not the reason for wearing the uniform. **While answering the question "Why do we Sikhs keep the 5 symbols?" mentioning their advantages is an incorrect way of justifying the wearing of them.** One can say I am keeping my *kirpan* (sword) for protecting myself. Other persons have been heard to challenge this reply by asking "Why not keep a pistol instead of a sword? Why not have an automatic opening knife? Why not keep it concealed when it is meant to challenge your enemies? Why wear the *kirpan* outside?"

The *kirpan* cannot be replaced by any arm because the *kirpan* is a part of the uniform of the *SantSi-pahi*. He can keep any arm for his protection in addition to wearing his *kirpan*. It is not just for the utility or the advantage of the 5 symbols that we wear them; we do so because the Guru made their wearing a requirement for Sikhs as a policeman or a player is required to wear his uniform.

#### **10. Why is the *Kara* (bracelet) not of silver or gold?**

Silver and gold are metals used for ornaments. Not just any *Kara*, but the steel *Kara* is a part of the 5-symbol uniform, and it cannot be replaced by a gold or silver *Kara*.

#### **11. If you do *Amritshak*, can ladies wear earrings, makeup, and other jewelry?**



According to the Sikh *Reht Maryada*, there is no objection to wearing any kind of jewelry by an *Amritdhari* person provided one does not have to pierce his/her ear or nose to wear it. During the olden days, the wearing of earrings and noserings indicated slavery. The owners used them to identify their slaves. This does not fit in the Khalsa culture. We, the Khalsa, enjoy full freedom and are not slaves of any person or even of any god; hence we feel it degrading to wear earrings.

The reader may be surprised to know that wearing earrings is a recent fad. In early sixties, when the author visited the USA for higher studies, he did not see any woman or a girl with earrings. Rather he found, coeds chuckling at the 'silly' act of Indian women students piercing their ears and putting rings in them. They believed that it was a practice of backward and uncultured people. (In 1961 two American friends of the author showed their concern about this hurtful and meaningless Indian custom).

What a U-turn fashion has taken now! All females young or old, almost without exception, are now seen wearing earrings. The size and design of the rings have no limits. The earrings have grown long enough to touch the shoulders and they swing around when the head is suddenly moved to left or right.

Such fads come and go to be replaced by new ones. Wearing lipstick, earrings, skirts, and keeping long hair by boys is another example. However it is healthier for the mind and convenient for the body to live and dress simply and gracefully. Those who avoid

such fads enjoy greater and everlasting peace of mind and keep themselves free from self-inflicted punishment. It also strengthens their mind to think independently and live as leaders among their peers. See also chapter VI, Question 6.

**12. Can a person who is not an *Amritdhari* Sikh be as brave and true as an *Amritdhari* Sikh?**

Bravery is not limited to any caste, country, or religion. Brave people have born all over the world and in all communities.

It may, however, be mentioned that bravery does not necessarily indicate the great physical strength of a person. It relates more to the internal moral and spiritual strength. Bhai Duni Chand, a big heavy man and physically very strong, was one of the devotees of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru asked him to fight with a drunken elephant who was to be lead to break open the gates of the fort at Anand Pur. Bhai Duni Chand got scared and slipped out of the fort. Bhai Bachitar Singh, a thin lean young man, faced that elephant with a strong spear and turned him back on its own men.

Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh, the brave young sons of the Guru, while still in their teens, fought with the army at Chamkaur Sahib. They could not be scared by the hefty strong soldiers of the Nawab of Sirhind. Mai Bhago was a very brave Sikh woman. She had the courage to go from village to village, gather Sikhs, and challenge the Mughal army in 1705 at a pool now known as Muktsar. The Mughals

suffered defeat at her hands and returned to their headquarters leaving the Guru free to move about in the area.

Similarly, any person can follow truth. There are examples all over the world, people sacrificing their lives but not giving up their faith. It is only our ego, lust, greed, etc., that mislead us from the path of the truth. Only those who can overcome these tendencies, can become brave and follow truth even at the cost of their lives.

### **13. Should you put your *kirpan* over or under your shirt?**

All the five K's of the Khalsa uniform have their place and should be worn accordingly. The normal practice is to wear the *kirpan* outside the shirt. Some people wear it under the shirt, probably to avoid the question, "Why are you wearing it?" from the persons they meet.

### **14. Do Sikhs celebrate Diwali?**

- **Is tying a "Rakhri" or "Rakhi" a Sikh ritual? Why or why not?**

(i) Yes. On Diwali day fireworks are displayed at the Golden Temple, Amritsar. Sikhs gather there in maximum numbers on that day.

Diwali day has a different significance for people of different faiths. For many people, it is more a social celebration of happiness than a religious day. We are

not sure if some religious connections attributed to that day are historically true or not. It is, however, known that Bhai Mani Singh Shaheed, during the early 18th century, started the gathering of the Khalsa at Amritsar twice a year, once on Baisakhi (spring), and the second time on Diwali (autumn).

(ii) The Rakhri ritual is not a Sikh ritual. Its practice does not fit in the Sikh philosophy. Rakhi or Rakhri means protection. This is a custom among some Hindus. Accepting a Rakhri from a girl, sister or a cousin, means that the boy takes the responsibility of protecting her if she happens to get into any trouble. As a token of his promise, he gives some money to the girl after she ties the Rakhri on his wrist.

The ritual of Rakhri assumes that a girl cannot protect herself. This gives secondrate status to the women. Hence, it is not an approved custom among the Sikhs.

According to historic tradition, the Rakhi or Rakhri was a magic thread tied by a Tantric Yogi, a holy person, or a fakir, to protect the wearer from evil happenings. Later, the Rakhri took the form of the present colorful banglelike thread with flowers and other decorations tied to it.

### **15. My mom says you should not wash your hair on Fridays. Why not?**

Some people consider certain days to be good or bad for certain actions. In the West, many people believe there is a particular day when one should not work but pray; Sunday, Saturday, and Friday are such

days for the Christians, the Jews, and the Muslims respectively. They do not eat meat or a particular kind of meat on certain days of the week, or during certain weeks of the year.

Similarly, Hindus also consider certain days to be auspicious or inauspicious for certain actions. As mentioned in the question, some people don't wash their hair on Friday or Thursday; some don't travel on particular days in a particular direction.

**In the Sikh faith, no such thinking is entertained.** The Sikhs believe the names of the days and the numbering of the dates are given by man and not by God. **God made days, not good or bad days.** They become good or bad to us according to our actions. When you love and remember God, *Gurmat* says it is a good day for you; when you ignore Him it is a bad day.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋਈ ਦਿਨਸੁ ਸੁਹਾਵੜਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਆਵੈ ਚਿਤਿ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਫਿਟੁ ਭਲੇਰੀ ਰੁਤਿ॥ Page 318

ਜਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਭਾਈ ਤਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਮਰੀਐ ਝੁਰਿ॥ Page 640

**16. Why do boys wear "pugree"? Why can't they keep their hair hanging down like English people? Also, male Sikhs tie turbans; why not female Sikhs?**

(i) Covering their heads by people is an ageold world custom. It was generally considered good culture and respectable behavior for all social, formal, and religious functions. Some people keep this tradition even today. Orthodox Jews keep a small cap on their head. A Christian bride during her wedding covers her head

and face by a veil. In some churches, Christians attend the congregation with their heads covered. During a Hindu marriage, the groom always ties a turban and the bride keeps her head (usually her face as well) covered with a veil. All Rajputs, with or without long hair, who were the ruling class and fighters, kept a turban on their heads.

"Pugree", the turban, was tied during the preSikh period in almost all of India. It was considered royal attire. High Muslim officials wore turbans. **Respect and turbans went together.** A man without a turban was considered a lowly, poor person. Tying a turban meant the wearer was a responsible and honorable person.

In the recent past, an uncovered head of a person, particularly a priest or any other responsible person, meant something bad had happened, usually a death in the family. A very interesting folk tale will help to explain it.

A Brahman went out for a morning bath in the river as usual. After a quick dip, he came running home forgetting his turban there. His wife, seeing him coming without a turban on his head, started crying, assuming someone had died. When the Brahman came into the house, finding his wife weeping, he also started weeping aloud. This set everybody who came there, weeping. When they stopped, one member asked "Who is dead?" The lady said the Brahman knows it because he came home without a turban. The Brahman immediately uttered, "Oh! Where is my turban? Yes. I forgot it at the river in the morning. The water was very cold

and it was windy." A turban was expected never to be forgotten by a respectable or a religious person.

For the Sikhs, it is a religious symbol rather than merely a social symbol of honor. We cannot copy other cultures in leaving the hair unattended or hanging down. We also cannot cut our hair. There is only one way to keep the hair; that is to tie it on your head and cover it with a *pugree*.

Females are allowed to wear turbans. Even when they wear turbans, the Panjab tradition requires that they keep their scarf (*chunni*) on their shoulders to cover the upper part of the body as a matter of graceful dressing. Traditionally, some women wear a slightly different kind of small turban called *Keski*, which holds the hair on the head. The males also wear a small turban on their heads when staying inside the house. In public, however, they are always expected to wear a normal size turban. (See also Chapter VI Question 9.)

**17. You ask us (girls) to keep our heads fully covered with scarf, but why men don't cover their beards in the Gurdwaras?**

**• We cover our heads in Gurdwaras, I know it is out of respect. Is God not everywhere outside?**

(i) For ladies and gentlemen, it is good culture to keep their faces visible and their heads covered. With some minor differences this is practiced all over the world. Only guilty men who commit a crime, particularly a social crime such as stealing, raping, cheating, etc. cover their faces. People, with or without a beard, who

have done good jobs are proud to show their face, because it is clean of sins.

It must be mentioned here that there are also cultural reasons to cover the face. Out of modesty a Hindu married woman covers her face with a veil in the presence of any male member of the family older than her husband. Muslim women cover their face as a religious requirement.

(ii) The head is to be kept covered by a Sikh, not only while in the Gurdwara but also everywhere else, i.e., in social gatherings and moving out among the people. While in their homes, the Sikhs keep their heads covered with a small scarf or *Keski*.

In a Gurdwara, everyone, a Sikh or a nonSikh, out of respect for the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and for good manners, is required to keep his/her head covered. As most of the nonSikhs usually keep their heads uncovered, they have to put some covering on their heads before going into the Gurdwara. From this, a wrong notion has been formed that the covering of heads by the Sikhs is required only in the Gurdwara. The turban is an essential part of the dress of a Sikh. In the house, however, he uses a short informal turban called *Keski* to keep his head covered.



## Chapter IV

# SIKH HISTORY

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1. **Who made Guru Nanak Dev a Guru? Or how did Guru Nanak find out he was a Guru?**
  - **Why does not someone like Guru Nanak come to earth in this time to stop wickedness, thefts, liars, etc.?** (May first see Chapter VII Question 3)

(i) A teacher (Guru) is made by his students (disciples) as a father is "made" by his son. If there are no students, there is no teacher. Guru Nanak taught people how to live their life truthfully. The philosophy he preached was, "Truth is above all; highest is truthful living." The people found that his teachings lit the dark path of their lives. The masses, therefore, accepted him as the teacher, Guru. This is how he was declared a Guru. The popular saying about him is:

*Nanak Shah Fakir; Hindu Ka Guru, Musalman Ka Pir.*

Nanak is a great holy man; both Hindus and Muslims accept him as their spiritual guide."

The mass acceptance of Nanak as a Guru took a long time. Therefore, no particular day can be named when he was accepted as Guru by the people. From his very childhood, he had been teaching lessons to the people through the actions of his life. He taught us that the true bargain is sharing our earnings with the needy. The best company, he said, is the association of holy men who love God. At Sultan Pur, he preached that honest living is the right way to earn one's livelihood. Jealousy is a journey on the wrong path. Misappropriation of public stores and money is an antireligious act.

When he was working for the Nawab of Sultan Pur, Guru Nanak as usual went to the nearby river Bein to take his bath. He did not return for three days. The villagers and officials got worried and were anxious to see him alive. On the third day, when they saw him coming to the village, they immediately gathered around Guru Nanak. They asked him about his absence. He answered, "I have brought a message from the Master to deliver to you. There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman. (*Humanity should not be classified as Hindus or Muslims.*) We, as human beings, are all His children, hence equal. We cannot be divided into different groups or castes, as high or low."

This formal sermon was given in 1499. After this, he quit his job and spent the rest of his life sharing this message with the people. That year may be accepted as the year of the beginning of his Guruship. Guru Nanak is regarded as having been formally accepted as a Guru from that time on. After declaring his message, the Guru decided to carry it to all the people

in India and nearby countries. He traveled for about two decades to visit the holy places of different religions and explain his message to the people there.

(ii) It is good to know that many of you wish someone like Guru Nanak to be with us and guide us on the right path. Fortunately, not only Guru Nanak but all the Gurus and other Holy persons (Bhagats) are here with us today. We have only to "meet" them and "listen" to them.

ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ॥ Page 982

Lessons given in the sacred *Gurbani* are the 'Guru'. A disciple who obeys *Gurbani*, will surely achieve the goal of human life.

*Gurbani* is Guru (spirit of the Guru, message of the Guru.) Reading *Gurbani* is talking to the Guru because the words were actually spoken by the Guru. Whatever the Gurus and Bhagats told people was recorded by them in the form of holy hymns for the benefit of whole humanity. Now, it is for us to take advantage of *Gurbani*, recite it, sing it, enjoy it and benefit from the directions mentioned there in for our guidance.

The original compilation of all these hymns, prepared by Guru Arjun Dev, is still available with us at Kartarpur, Panjab. Later, to it were added the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur and the scripture was authenticated by Guru Gobind Singh. The scripture is now called Guru Granth Sahib, and is respected as a living spirit of the Gurus.

Translations of *Gurbani* are available in simple Panjabi, English, French and Hindi. People are welcome to read them and enjoy them. However, it is good if the seeker learns the Panjabi language so that he/she can recite and listen to the original holy words uttered by the Godtuned persons and enjoy the spiritual bliss.

We know many people, during the Guru period and also after that, guided their lives on the path laid by *Gurmat*. Today, we have the original directions for the path as told by the Gurus. It is now for us to follow that path. The Guru tells us to live the life of *Sewa-Simran* and at the same time keep away from ego, lust, anger, greed and other vices. We learn this by reciting and singing *Gurbani*. Let us make a beginning to live that life and we will find Gurus standing by us and guiding us on the right path.

ਗੁਰੁ ਮੇਰੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਦਾ ਹੈ ਨਾਲੇ॥ Page 394

(See question 8 as well.)

**2. If the ten Gurus were supposed to lead us to a very happy life, why did they lead us through so much destruction and death?**

The Gurus guided humanity to the path of truth, peace and happiness. However, the overly zealous religious leaders, Kazis (judges) and Brahmans did not like his preaching or his growing popularity. They were getting donations from the people with false promises of salvation. Sometimes they would extract money from them with the threat of Hell. The rulers and also

the judges were sucking the blood of the common man by their corrupt behavior and biased decisions. Guru Nanak raised a voice against all these bloodsuckers of society.

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ॥ Page 1288

Kings are like bloodsucking beasts. The officials act like dogs.

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ॥

ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ॥ Page 662

Kazi (Judges) are corrupt, Brahmans suck the blood of the helpless. Yogis don't know the path of God. These three (because of their vested interests) are responsible for the problems of the masses.

The corrupt officials and bigoted religious leaders all joined hands to challenge this movement for human rights founded under the leadership of Guru Nanak. They used their political, social, and financial powers to harass the Gurus and their Sikhs who had, therefore, to undergo tortures and sufferings to save the common, helpless persons. Sikhs ungrudgingly faced a lot of state terrorism and repression. By suffering for the cause of the human rights of the weak, they were teaching us the Sikh principle:

ਸੂਰਾ ਸੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤ॥

ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤੁ॥ Page 1105

The brave man is he who protects the rights of the weak. He continues his fight against oppression even if he gets cut into pieces.

Thousands of Sikhs suffered for over a century, but as a result of this, millions of people got their freedom from the tyrannical rulers. Everybody knows that

soldiers suffer and die so that their countrymen can live in peace and prosperity. In the same way, the Gurus and the Khalsa, suffered to protect human rights and freedom of religion for every human being. Suffering and death are not as 'painful' as remaining slaves generation after generation without being permitted to practice one's own faith. Such a life of slavery is not worth living. Suffering and dying while espousing the cause of such suppressed people is a high goal of human life.

**3. Why did Guru Gobind Singh have more than one wife? How many marriages did Guru Gobind Singh have?**

The wrong impression that the Guru had more than one wife was created by those writers who were ignorant of Panjabi culture. Later authors accepted those writings indicating more than one marriage of the Guru and presented it as a royal act. During those days kings, chiefs, and other important people usually had more than one wife as a symbol of their being great and superior to the common man. Guru Gobind Singh, being a true king, was justified in their eyes to have had more than one wife. This is actually incorrect.

In the Panjab, there are two and sometimes three big functions connected with a marriage, i.e., engagement, wedding, and *Mukhlawa*. Big gatherings and singings are held at all these three functions. In many cases, the engagement was held as soon as the person had passed the infant stage. Even today engagements at 8 to 12 years of age are not uncommon in

some interior parts of India. The wedding is performed a couple of years after the engagement. After the wedding, it takes another couple of years for the bride to move in with her in-laws and live there. This is called *Muklawa*. A dowry and other gifts to the bride are usually given at the time of this ceremony to help her to establish a new home. Now, the wedding and *Muklawa* are performed on the same day and only when the partners are adults.

A big befitting function and other joyful activities were held at Anand Pur, according to custom, at the time of the engagement of the Guru. The bride, Mata Jeeto Ji, resided at Lahore, which was the capital of the Mughal rulers who were not on good terms with the Gurus. When the time for the marriage ceremony came, it was not considered desirable for the Guru to go to Lahore, along with the armed Sikhs in large numbers. Furthermore, it would involve a lot of traveling and huge expenses, in addition to the inconvenience to the *Sangat*, young and old, who wished to witness the marriage of the Guru. Therefore, as mentioned in the Sikh chronicles, Lahore was 'brought' to Anand Pur Sahib for the marriage instead of the Guru going to Lahore. A scenic place a couple of miles to the north of Anand Pur was developed into a nice camp for the marriage. This place was named Guru Ka Lahore. Today, people going to Anand Pur visit this place as well. The bride was brought to this place by her parents and the marriage was celebrated with a very huge gathering attending the ceremony.

The two elaborate functions, one at the time of engagement and the other at the time of the marriage

of the Guru, gave the outside observers the impression of two marriages.

They had reason to assume this because a second name was also there, i.e., Mata Sundari Ji. After the marriage, there is a custom in the Panjab of giving a new affectionate name to the bride by her in-laws. Mata Jeeto Ji, because of her fine features and good looks, was named Sundari (beautiful) by the Guru's mother. The two names and two functions gave a basis for outsiders to believe that the Guru had two wives. In fact, the Guru had one wife with two names as explained above.

Some historians even say that Guru Gobind Singh had a third wife, Mata Sahib Kaur. In 1699, the Guru asked her to put *patasas* (puffed sugar) in the water for preparing *Amrit* when he founded the Khalsa Panth. Whereas Guru Gobind Singh is recognized as the *spiritual father* of the Khalsa, Mata Sahib Kaur is recognized as the *spiritual mother* of the Khalsa.

People not conversant with the *Amrit* ceremony mistakenly assume that Mata Sahib Kaur was the wife of Guru Gobind Singh. As Guru Gobind Singh is the spiritual but not the biological father of the Khalsa, Mata Sahib Devan is the spiritual mother of the Khalsa but not the wife of Guru Gobind Singh.

From ignorance of Panjabi culture and the *Amrit* ceremony, some writers mistook these three names of the women in the life of Guru Gobind Singh as the names of his three wives. Another reason for this misunderstanding is that the parents of Mata Sahib Devan, as some Sikh chronicles have mentioned, had decided to marry her to Guru Gobind Singh. When the



proposal was brought for discussion to Anandpur, the Guru had already been married. Therefore, the Guru said that he could not have another wife since he was already married. The dilemma before the parents of the girl was that, the proposal having become public, no Sikh would be willing to marry her. The Guru agreed for her to stay at Anand Pur but without accepting her as his wife. The question arose, as most women desire to have children, how could she have one without being married. The Guru told, "*She will be the "mother" of a great son who will live forever and be known all over the world.*" The people understood the hidden meaning of his statement only after the Guru associated Mata Sahib Devan with preparing *Amrit* by bringing *patasas*. It is, therefore, out of ignorance that some writers consider Mata Sahib Devan as the worldly wife of Guru Gobind Singh.

#### **4. Who built the Golden Temple and when?**

The decision to found the city now called Amritsar, was made in 1570. The selection of the place was made by Guru Amar Das who deputed Bhai Jetha Ji (later Guru Ram Das) to start the preliminary work. The land chosen belonged to the villages of Gumtala, Sultan Wind, Gilwali and Tung. The people of these villages and others around gathered there to inaugurate the Sikh center. First, a tank named Santokh Sar was dug for the storage of water and later the digging of the sacred pool was started. The construction of the residential places, markets, business centers, stores, manufacturing units, and other places of work was

taken up simultaneously. People of different professions were invited to come and settle around the center to start their work or business. Keeping in mind the growth of the place, more land was purchased later on. The Amritsar gazetteer 1883 - 1884, states:

*In 1577 he (Guru Ram Das) obtained a grant of the site together with 500 bighas (about 100 acres) of land from the Emperor Akbar on payment of Rupees 700 to the Zemindars of Village Tung, who owned the land.*

The place during its development, was known as Guru Ka Chak, Chak Ram Das, and Ram Das Pur. With the completion of the sacred pool, *Amrit Sarovar*, the city became popular as Amritsar.

Guru Ram Das completed the digging of the Sarovar. Before his death in 1581, he passed on the Guruship to his youngest son, Guru Arjan Dev. The fifth Guru built the Harimandar Sahib in the middle of the pool and completed the construction of the buildings around there. The foundation of the holy Harimandar Sahib was laid in 1589. A Muslim holy man Mian Mir, was invited by Guru Arjan Dev Ji for this occasion. The building was completed in 1604 and the sacred volume of the Guru Granth Sahib was installed there. Nothing else but *Kirtan*, i.e., singing virtues of the Lord, goes on all the time there.

The present structure of the Harimandar Sahib was constructed by the Khalsa Panth in 1765. The old structure was blown up in 1762 by Ahmed Shah Durani to subdue the Sikhs. He filled the pool with debris and dead cows to desecrate it. He was told by the

Governor of Lahore that the pool and the Harimandar Sahib are the source of the life of the Sikhs. With the hope of ending Sikh power, he destroyed the holy place. The Sikhs stood up for their rights and within three years became strong enough to defeat the Afghans and to hold many of their soldiers as prisoners during 1764. To teach them a unique kind of lesson, they made those very soldiers clean the Amritsar pool and then released them without any further punishment. No one was tortured or murdered for desecrating the holy place. They were merely advised not to do that again. The Harimandar Sahib stands there and spreads the message of peace to all the people in the world.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had gold work done on the Harimandar Sahib in 1830. Since the visit of the British, the Harimandar Sahib got its popular name Golden Temple because of the domes and upper story of the Harimandar Sahib being gold plated.

The Akal Takhat, situated towards the northern side of the Harimandar Sahib, was built by Guru Har Gobind. More buildings were added around the pool and in the vicinity by the Sikh Misls during the later part of the 18th century. The Misls were allotted residential areas for their members so that they could keep the Sikhs there to protect the sanctity of the Harimandar Sahib from future attacks of the invaders.

The peace spread by the Harimandar Sahib was disturbed in 1978 when on Baisakhi Day 13 Sikhs were murdered by the false Nirankaris. (A cult supported by the Indian government to clash with the Sikhs and provide a chance for the government to

suppress the Sikhs.) The situation became very tense after that and an outright war in 1984 when Indra Gandhi ordered the Indian army to attack the complex. The army destroyed the Akal Takhat, Sikh holy relics and handwritten scriptures of the Gurus' times. Many adjacent buildings were heavily damaged and the Golden Temple had hundreds of bullet marks. Thousands of innocent visitors and priests and employees of the Gurdwara committee who were on duty were murdered in cold blood by the army.

**5. Where was the first Sikh temple built? And in North America?**

(i) It is difficult to say where and when the first Gurdwara was built. The main Sikh center at Amritsar, as mentioned above, was formally inaugurated in 1604 when the holy scripture compiled by the fifth Guru was installed there. The city was founded in 1577 by Guru Ram Das Ji. The place was chosen by Guru Amar Das in 1570 when the digging of the sacred pool was started jointly with the cooperation of the surrounding villages.

Earlier, the preaching were done at Goindwal, a town situated on the western bank of the river Beas. Guru Amar Das built the town and the Baoli (open well with steps leading down to the water level) there for all people irrespective of their caste or faith. Guru Angad Dev had his headquarters in his own village, Khadur, about four miles upstream from Goindwal.

Guru Nanak Dev settled at Kartarpur, located on the western bank of the river Ravi, where in 1520

he started a center for regular preaching of the Sikh faith. The village, however, was founded much earlier by the Guru, after returning from his journey to Southern India.

Earlier than the founding of Kartarpur, there were many places sanctified by the visit or stay of the Guru there. Gurdwaras, however, were built at those places later in memory of the Guru. It cannot be said with certainty when those places were formally inaugurated for preaching the Sikh faith.

The birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev, Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib (Pakistan) can be regarded as the oldest Sikh sacred place. It is at this place that Guru Nanak denied being Hindu by refusing to undergo the ceremony of wearing the *Janju* (thread). He thus, for the first time, indirectly told people that he planned to reveal a new faith and not follow the ancestral faith. The Gurdwara, of course, was built there much later. Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, a few miles from Nankana Sahib, is the place where the Guru gave to the people his first lesson, "We should share our earnings with the needy."

The Guru gave his first formal spiritual sermon in 1499, "There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman," at Sultan Pur, Lodhi on the eastern side of the river Beas.

(ii) The Sikhs came to North America sometime during the early 1890's. They did not organize themselves formally until the first decade of this century. As late as 1898 there was a press report that some unique kind of people (the Sikhs) were seen in Vancouver with uncut hair and turbans on their heads. It

was in 1902 that Sikhs came to Vancouver in big groups. It is said that the first sacred volume of the Adi Guru Granth Sahib was brought to Vancouver in 1904. The Sikh *Sangat* started holding their regular functions at that time. By 1906 they had organized themselves and purchased a property at West 2nd Avenue. The first formal Gurdwara was built there in 1908. The same organization, Khalsa Diwan Society, shifted the Gurdwara to its present site, 8000 Ross Street, Vancouver in 1969. It was declared to be the best building in 1978.

The Sikhs in California, USA, organized themselves into the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society and built their first Gurdwara in 1911 at Stockton. Sikh *Sangats* had been formed earlier at other places as well but this was the first registered body of the Sikhs.

**6. Does it really matter whether the Sakhis are true or not? They teach us how to be good Sikhs which is what matters.**

(i) Sakhis are a part of history; however, the actual details mentioned by the writers/narrators differ and may not be true. This happens all the time with all religions. If two people write about an historical incident they give different details. Many Sakhis were not written at the time they happened. They were only oral history passed on from person to person. It must be remembered that Sikh Sakhis are not fables; they are a part of history. Some differences and variations in them, however, have been introduced because of the perceptions and feelings of the writers and narrators

when they were passed on from generation to generation orally.

Fables and mythological stories are written for moral lessons. They are acceptable as they have a very important place in the literature of a nation, community, and religion. In the Sikh religion too, people have written such literature to teach lessons to the common, uneducated masses. Sometimes, they are confused with historical Sakhis. That is not in the interest of the Sikhs or the Sikh philosophy.

(ii) It is agreed that the purpose of the Sakhis or the fables is to teach us how to be good people. We should learn lessons from them for guiding us in our lives rather than wasting time in arguing about their details.

## **7. Who made the Panjabi writings first?**

Panjabi is a very old language. Even before the Guru period the language was commonly spoken by the people. The Panjabi script was used to write it. Many characters of Panjabi are quite similar to those of Dev Nagari (Hindi) script. Old writings are found sometimes having a mixture of Gurmukhi (Panjabi) and Dev Nagari script.

It was during the period of the second Guru that a formal and extensive teaching of the Gurmukhi script was taken up. The script having been adopted, standardized and popularized by the Gurus became known as Gurmukhi. However, there is proof in the Guru Granth Sahib itself that the 35 letters of Gurmukhi were

in use even during the time of Bhagat Kabir. Bhagat Ji has written his hymns based on the Panjabi letters which are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak Dev Ji has also written hymns starting with the Panjabi letters.

It is agreed by many scholars that the current forms of many letters were given a final form by Guru Angad Dev Ji. The standardized forms of the letters made it possible for the script to become popular. Guru Angad Dev Ji did make a big contribution to popularize the Gurmukhi script with the people. He founded schools to teach Gurmukhi. From this some people got the impression that the Gurmukhi script was invented by Guru Angad Dev Ji.

**8. Are the pictures of the Gurus real? If not, then why do we hang them?**

- **If the Guru let somebody paint a picture of him, are you allowed to bow or to pray to it? Is it considered all right to have the pictures of Gurus if you don't worship them?**

Let us first discuss the Sikh philosophy regarding pictures of the Gurus before answering the questions. According to the Sikh principles, not the physical features of his body, but the words said by the Guru are the 'Guru'.

ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ॥ Page 982

Lessons given in the sacred *Gurbani* are the 'Guru'. A disciple who obeys *Gurbani*, will surely achieve the goal of human life.



The holy hymns spoken by the Gurus, Bhagats, and other contributors, were compiled and installed as 'Shabad Guru' in the Golden Temple, Amritsar. No pictures or idols of the Guru (none were there), were allowed to be placed in the buildings or depicted on its walls. For making the environment aesthetic and soothing to the mind, flowers, geometrical figures and other artwork was engraved on the walls of the Golden Temple. Pictures and paintings of the Gurus are conspicuous by their absence.

One wonders how the false pictures of the Gurus and even their plastic, wooden and metallic idols appeared, not only in the houses of the Sikhs but also in many Gurdwaras. This is nothing but Brahmanical philosophy displacing the Sikh faith from the Sikh houses and their places of worship.

**It can easily be known from the historical records as to how fake pictures and then statues of the Gurus entered the Golden Temple and Sikh houses. What seems to be extremely difficult is, how to throw them out of the Gurdwaras and the Sikh psyche.** Not only a few credulous Sikhs, some traditional preachers and even a few educated Sikhs have started believing in Guru pictures. They think that keeping pictures of the Gurus in the house is the *Gurmat* method of showing respect to the Gurus and obtaining their blessings. Some Sikhs have been seen garlanding the Guru pictures and serving food to them for 'Bhog', a practice prohibited for the Sikhs.

Not all Sikhs, of course, have reached the stage of worshipping the Gurus' pictures/paintings as the

Hindus worship their idols, but a large number of them are on their way to do that. Some scholars want these pictures (all are surely fake) to be destroyed whereas others suggest that only their worship be prohibited.

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ

*Bhai Gurdas Var 24-11*

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਇ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ।

*Bhai Gurdas Var 7-20*

Bhai Gurdas explains that the picture of the Guru is his "Word", Gurbani, which a Sikh is to love.

(ii) The history of the imaginary Guru pictures is briefly stated below.

When the Keshadhari Sikhs during the 18th century were forced to leave the villages and live in the forests, the nonKeshadhari disciples took care of the Sikh Gurdwaras and the historical places. These disciples did not board the ship of Sikh Faith; they only held it in their hands but kept their feet stuck in the Hindu Boat. The Brahmanical influence, which was still holding their mind, obliged them to depict popular mythological scenes on the walls of the Gurdwaras as they were traditionally depicted on the walls of the Hindu temples. When the pictures of the Hindu gods and their consorts appeared on the Gurdwara walls, the pictures of the Gurus had also to appear as a natural sequence. All pictures, of course, differed and were subject to the imagination of the painters. The pictures from the walls moved on to the paper and were printed in large numbers to reach every Sikh house and every Gurdwara. Only a few vigilant managers did not permit

any kind of pictures, howsoever 'genuine' or 'superior' they were claimed to be, to come even near the boundary of the Gurdwaras. Once the pictures of the Gurus were accepted as 'true' and 'good' by the masses, how could anyone stop them from taking the form of idols and statues? Unfortunately, it appears that they are here to stay at least for the time being.

During the 18th century, not only the nonSikh but antiSikh rituals were practiced in Gurdwaras without any objection because the Khalsa had moved to the forests. The sacred places were managed by the Sanatni (Brahmanical) Sikhs or by those Mahants who still believed in Hindu rituals even after associating themselves with the Sikh faith.

When the Sikhs lost their Raj in Panjab in 1849, they had time to turn their thoughts towards their faith. They were surprised to find Sikhism already pushed out of the Gurdwaras by Brahmanical rituals. The worship of idols, whether of the Hindu gods or of the Sikh Gurus, is prohibited for the Sikhs. However, both were worshipped by the Sikhs in the precincts of the Golden Temple.

### **True Pictures?**

No true pictures of the Guru exist, though some have been claimed to be true pictures. One 'true' picture is totally different from the other 'true' picture. Most of them are modern paintings. Some old sketches / paintings are also available, but all are based on the imagination of the painters. No Guru permitted his painting to be made in his time, because

it is against the philosophy of the Sikh faith as mentioned earlier. We should not have Guru pictures in our houses or Gurdwaras. Instead we should have *Gurbani* hymns written and hung for our guidance in our house.

**Bending/bowing before the pictures or garlanding them is prohibited even if they were true pictures.** The Sikh philosophy tells that 'words' said by the Guru are the 'Guru' (now Guru Granth Sahib). We bow not before a book, as some persons think, but to the 'Gian' (knowledge) therein.

### **9. Can we make movies with the Gurus as actors as Hindus do with gods?**

We do not need movies for teaching people any aspect of our Sikh philosophy. *Gurbani* is available to us for guiding us on any topic. One can read or listen to hymns every day to obtain the required peace for his/her soul.

People expect, not to learn the principles of their faith but to be entertained at movies. Religion is a very serious matter and needs to be learnt respectfully for obtaining guidance in leading one's life on the right path. Religion is not an amusement for relaxation as the movies generally are. We can have a documentary of the Gurdwaras describing their history, their buildings, and the facilities available there for the visitors. This should be free from any kind of false acting.

It is disrespectful to the Guru Granth Sahib, the faith, and the Sikhs to use the holy scripture as an actor in the movies. No individual, however high a holy

person he may be, can act as a Guru in a movie. We believe our Guru is the word of the Guru, the *Shabad* Guru, Guru Granth Sahib.

## Chapter V

# GURDWARA PROTOCOL

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### (A) GURDWARA

- 1. Why do we have to take off our shoes when we go into Baba ji's room or Gurdwara when Christians don't, even though they too have their holy Bible placed in their church?**

For us, the Guru Granth Sahib is the living spirit of the Gurus, not just a compilation of religious discourses, as the Bible is. The Bible is handled like a book by the Christians, but we respect the Guru Granth Sahib as the living spiritual Guru. Hence we offer all our respect and regard by taking off our shoes and humbly sitting crosslegged in a Gurdwara.

In Eastern culture, taking off shoes and covering one's head whenever you present yourself to some holy personality is considered a way of respecting the person. We greet our friends with folded hands and a slight bow to express our respect for a senior person.

In the Middle East, the Muslims too take off their shoes and cover their heads when they go to the

mosque for their prayers. They do not walk with their shoes on even near graves to respect the people buried there.

In the Gurdwara we take off our shoes, not only to show respect to the Guru, but also because we have to sit on the floor. We can sit more comfortably without shoes than with the shoes on. In that posture one can listen to the *Kirtan* attentively.

## **2. Why do we keep a moneybox before the Guru Granth Sahib? Is God greedy?**

- **Where does that money go?**

### **(a) Is God greedy?**

A Sikh makes his offerings (money, groceries, etc.) before the Guru to express his thanks for His favors. We do not give donations or charity to God or the Guru. It is a way of expressing our love and regards for Him. One example will explain it.

A professor takes great interest in his student. He loves him and helps him in his studies. The student obtains a degree and finds a good job. He brings a gift of sweets to his teacher to say, *My teacher, thank you for all you did to help me through my education. It has enabled me to get a nice job.* The student is not giving a charity or a donation to his teacher by offering him the sweets but expressing his love and respect to him through it.

In the same way, a Sikh goes to the Gurdwara for expressing his thanks to God and to the Guru for

the favors he is enjoying as a human being. Sikhs consider this life as a gift of God for singing His praises. We are not born sinners as some Christians think it to be.

Further, when we give money for social cause, it again is not a charity or donation according to Sikh philosophy. This is sharing of earnings with others. A father brings some candy bars and gives them to one of his children. The child shares these with all his brothers and sisters. He is not donating or giving charity to his sisters or brothers by sharing the gifts given by their father. Similarly God is our Father. All things have been created by Him for His children who are supposed to share His gifts among themselves. This act of sharing is our responsibility. By doing so we are not obliging anyone but doing our duty assigned to us by our Father, God.

God is the creator of everything. He owns everything in this universe. God does not need "our" money. If a child offers a glass of juice to his father or mother, he is not giving it as a "charity" to them. Since everything in the house belongs to his parents, his act only shows his correct behavior. Actually, by this the parents educate their children to share the things in the house with their relatives and friends, as a matter of good conduct and responsible behavior. God being the Owner of everything in this world, and the Giver of everything to us, the question of His being greedy does not arise.

**(b) Where does the money go?**



Every religious organization/center is run by the contributions of the believers of that faith. Money is needed for maintenance of the buildings and for running the organization. Such expenses are met out of the offerings made by the visitors to the Gurdwara. Money is also spent for funding the projects to educate the members and their children about the faith.

**3. Why do men and women sit separately? Why is the stage always on the right side (the side of the men)?**

- **Why do we sit on the floor? It is hard for the people with back pains. In the Gurdwara, why is it bad for a person to sit against the wall?**

**(a) Sitting Separately**

(i) Good social behavior and manners demand that one should not be sitting very close or physically touching others' spouses. It is very difficult for anyone to avoid rubbing his shoulders with a person sitting close to him/her in the *Sangat*. In case men and women sit together mixed up in *Sangat*, it becomes very difficult for them to concentrate on hymns. One has to be always cautious to avoid physical touch with a person of the other gender and hence cannot pay full attention to the *Kirtan*. Even inadvertent touching or rubbing of shoulders can cause a case of misdemeanor and this can lead to serious trouble. It is, therefore, considered desirable for men and women to sit separately in one's own group.

(ii) No side can be reserved for men or women. It all depends upon convenience and situation. If the women are expected to be in large numbers, they sit on the side which can accommodate more persons. If there is a spill over from one side, and there is a space on the other side, men/women shift to that side.

In the Gurdwaras men and women usually sit on the side where they sat on the first day just as a matter of understanding. Even in the house, family members get used to their chairs around the dining table. Though no chair is reserved for anyone, as a matter of daily routine, each member usually sits on his/her regular chair.

(iii) The stage has no fixed place either on the right or left side of the Guru Granth Sahib. It all depends on convenience for deciding the side for the *Kirtan* stage. Different Gurdwaras have their stages on different sides. The most common practice is that the *Ragis* sit on one side with the males sitting on the other side and the females sitting behind the *Ragis* on the same side. Sometimes, the stage is arranged in the same line as the Guru Granth Sahib, so that the whole *Sangat* faces the *Ragis*, men sitting on the side of the *Ragis*. The stage may or may not be raised above the floor. In case of big gatherings, the stage is usually raised so that the people sitting away from the stage can have a direct look on the *Ragis* doing the *Kirtan*.

#### **(b) Sitting on the floor**

Sitting on the floor is an expression of humility before the Guru. Furthermore, it also makes people feel equal and allows each person to choose a place suitable for him/her. While sitting on the floor, one can enjoy *Kirtan* with greater concentration than while sitting in chairs or on benches. It needs only a little training to be able to sit comfortably on the floor without being tired. A common problem with sitting on the floor is caused by skintight pants, which are not supposed to be worn in a Gurdwara, anyway.

If a person has a medical problem and cannot sit without support for his back, there is no objection for his/her sitting by the wall of the Gurdwara. However, in practice it has been found that most of the people want to sit there for the sake of comfort and convenience, which needs to be discouraged. It is, therefore, suggested, that the people having a medical problem may be provided with a speaker in a separate room other than the *Sangat* hall. They may sit there with some support to overcome their medical handicap. In the Gurdwara we are supposed to be attentive and responsive as a student is supposed to be in his classroom while his teacher is teaching.

#### **4. Why do we have to do *Ardas*? (At the end of the function, just read *Gurbani* in the holy book).**

- **Why do we stand up for performing *Ardas*?**

(a) A formal Sikh function, whether at home or in a Gurdwara, is complete only when, after singing His virtues, we pray (do *Ardas*) to God to bless us with

those virtues. *Ardas* makes our mind feel humble and become receptive. In that state of mind, we make a promise to follow the right path and give up our ego, lust, anger, etc. That is the way to achieve peace. Hence, the *Ardas* is essential to serve the complete purpose of going to the Gurdwara.

*Ardas* is followed by the reading of a passage from the Guru Granth Sahib which is regarded as the order of the day for the Sikhs. It is usually explained in simple words to the audience for their benefit.

(b) When any public servant takes the oath of office he stands up and raises his right hand . Whenever we request something, we do so while standing before the authority. Hence, we say *Ardas* while standing with folded hands.

Informal *Ardas* can be said in any position, sitting, lying, driving, working, etc. When a Sikh opens the door of his car, he thinks of God and requests His blessings. The mere one word 'Waheguru' uttered by him at that time is complete *Ardas*. A person may pray and seek His blessings as many times as he can during the day by thinking of the Almighty without standing or folding his/her hands. On formal occasions and for congregational prayers, **the *Ardas* is always said standing and with folded hands keeping the mind tuned to the blessing of God.**

## **5. Why isn't there a woman Granthi?**

A man or a woman can perform the services of a Granthi in a Gurdwara. There is no gender bar or any

kind of discrimination against any person for becoming a Granthi. Sometimes, we do see a woman sitting in the service of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib during the Diwan time.

Being a Granthi is a very hard and demanding job. It is very difficult for a woman, particularly if she has children, to serve as a fulltime Granthi. This is a responsibility which sometimes requires working during odd hours. During a function, at the house of a Sikh, a Granthi is required to go early in the morning to arrange for the function. She may be required to stay there late after a night function and travel alone back to the Gurdwara. Because of the nature of the duty, it is usually performed by a male Sikh. It may often be performed jointly by the husband and the wife. They share this responsibility depending upon the nature and time of the duty.

**6. Why insist on suits for girls (no naked legs), when boys are allowed to wear shorts in the Gurdwara?**

Good manners demand covering of legs by all people, men or women, boys or girls, Sikhs or non-Sikhs visiting a Gurdwara. The reason for giving relaxation to the boys in some cases is again a question of culture. In the East (with particular reference to the Panjab) girls always wear Shalwar (not even a skirt) when they reach their teens. Girls when in primary schools are permitted to wear skirts. However, with the passage of time, this is changing.

*Think of the veil. A Western girl is proud to wear it during her wedding. Why doesn't the male wear it at the time of his marriage?* These are only cultural differences. Incidentally, do you note that the youth, both boys and girls, go to a church for their wedding well dressed and with their legs covered? We Sikhs are expected to go to a Gurdwara always in a formal and respectful dress.

Whatever the modern trend of wearing clothes, both boys and girls when in their teens, should attend Gurdwara or formal functions in formal clothes with their legs covered.

This custom is not unique to Sikhs. In some ancient churches in Europe, such as St. Paul's Cathedral, visitors (both male and female) are still required to cover their legs. If they have shorts, then they are made to purchase temporary "plastic" pants to wear for entering the churches.

**7. Why do we do *matha tek* ( bow to touch the ground with our forehead) to the holy Sikh Bible (Guru Granth Sahib)? Is it not idol worship?**

Bowing before Guru Granth Sahib is not idol worship. The answer has been discussed earlier. It is to make us feel humble and reduce our ego, the cause of our all problems. To explain it further, culture plays a very important role in the rituals of a religion. We can find such examples all over the world. There are different methods of greeting your friend in different cultures.

- i) Folding hands in front of your chest and bending head slightly,
- ii) Bending your body at the waist with your head bending downwards and hands going backwards, as with the Japanese
- iii) Shaking right hands, the most common international custom
- iv) Embracing each other, particularly Panjabi women.
- v) Exchange of kisses, as among the people of the middle East.

In India, bending down so as to touch the feet of an elderly or a holy person, is an age old custom to express respects to him/her. It is practiced even today as good manners. When the children in the Panjab go to or come from their school, they bend to touch the feet of their parents, particularly their grandparents. In the same way children in the West wish good night to their parents before going to bed.

**Respecting your parents by bending before them is not human worship.** It is a ritual to pay respect. In the West, people take off their hats to respect a woman or a senior person. Similarly, Sikhs, instead of taking off their hat (with a turban they cannot do it, even if they wanted to do it just like their Western friends), do *matha tek* before the Guru to pay their respect and regards. Bending before Guru Granth Sahib is to show one's respect and regards for the Guru; it is not idol worship.

Philosophically, this means that the person who bows before Guru Granth makes a promise to himself

to follow the path suggested by the *Gurbani*. It is something similar to taking an oath to the constitution by raising a hand. In this case, we bow the head instead of raising the hand. The act of bowing reminds a person of his or her being a Sikh and a believer in the teachings of *Gurbani*. It strengthens the faith in *Gurbani* which is essential to help us to walk on the path of the Guru.

**8. Why do we do *Chaur* on the Guru Granth Sahib? Why do we put the Granth Sahib on a bed? Why the *Chanani* or canopy?**

This is to express our regards and our respect for the Holy Scripture, the True King. The king commanded the greatest power, hence also the maximum respect and honor, in the olden days. Guru Nanak said that the true kings are those who love God and help others to do that. They are the rulers of the hearts of the people. The political kings are temporary kings and their authority ends with their death. The Gurus are the true kings; they teach Truth and rule our hearts. The Guru Granth Sahib is the embodiment of the spirit of all the Sikh Gurus and many other holy men whose hymns are included in it. We respect them as the true kings.

The king sat on a throne under a canopy. He used to have a fanlike structure to be waved over his head as a symbol of his royalty. The Guru Granth Sahib, being the true emperor, is provided all these regal paraphernalia in the Gurdwara. We install the scripture on a throne (called *Manji Sahib*) with pillows around for



supporting it. A canopy (*Chanani*) is provided above the scripture in the same way as it was put over the head of a king while he attended his court. During the session (*Diwan*), a person, with *Chaur* in his hand, is always in attendance on the scripture installed respectfully in the hall. For maintaining due regards and respect, we carry this holy scripture to another room when the hall is to be cleaned or when the session is over for the day. Before we bring the Guru Granth Sahib in the hall, we set everything in the hall properly. This is the court of the Guru. You will understand the whole ceremony better if you bring into mind the scene of the courtroom where everything is set and made ready before a judge enters his court. The Guru Granth Sahib is the Emperor of Emperors, hence all these ceremonial decorations.

**9. What is the difference between getting a name picked by the Guru Granth Sahib and by your parents? Are there any advantages in either way?**

The name is always picked by the parents whether in the Gurdwara or in the home. In the Gurdwara, when the function is over, a hymn is read from the Guru Granth Sahib. The first letter of the first word of the hymn is used as the first letter of the name to be chosen. The parents discuss it with their friends and the name they decide, is announced by the Granthi Sahib. This name is agreed to by the whole *Sangat* with a *Bole So Nihal Jaikara*.

The real advantage is that it builds our faith in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is good to start and live our lives with that faith. The name giving ceremony in the Gurdwara also makes the name known to all the people in the community.

**10. Why do we give out 'Parshad'? I feel guilty when I don't take it, but I don't like it because of its sugar and oily content.**

It is a custom all over the world to offer something good to a person who is dear to you. We visit the Gurdwara to pay respect to our Guru and listen to the praises of the Lord, God. The Guru loves us and on his behalf we are given a gift, the *Parshad*. It is very tasty, easily eaten, without the need of any drink to swallow it. It is prepared with equal quantities of wheat flour, sugar, and *ghee* (butter). If carefully prepared, it has no problem in its distribution or eating. In India, it is considered the best food and its name is used as a proverb to describe something extremely tasty and very easy to be swallowed. One needs to develop a taste for it to like it and enjoy it. Many children in the west do enjoy it and want to get a second serving of the *Parshad*. Of course, one can request a smaller serving if he/she so wants.

It is only when it is not well prepared that it gets sticky or is oily. Once in a while, omissions do take place in its preparation. We should value the spirit behind it and ignore the omissions. We do take bitter and distasteful medicine because we know it is good for our

health. Similarly taking *Parshad* is a part of our faith. We do it to reinforce our faith in *Gurmat*.

### **11. Why do we put *kirpan* in *Karah Parshad*?**

- **Why do we serve *Parshad* to *Panj Pyaras* first when all are equal? Why is a small pot of *Parshad* kept under the *Guru Granth Sahib*?**

#### ***kirpan* in *Parshad***

Putting a *kirpan* into *Karah Parshad* means that it has been accepted and sanctified by the *Guru* for distribution in the *Sangat*. During the *Guru* period, when offerings were presented to the *Guru*, he received them personally by touching them with his hand. During the later days, the *Guru* is said to have used a *kirpan* or an arrow to accept the offerings. The same practice was adopted by the *Sikhs* to accept and sanctify *Karah Parshad*.

#### ***Parshad* distribution:**

*Parshad* is distributed equally to all without discrimination. For distribution, one has to begin with someone sitting in the *Sangat*. All people cannot be given *Parshad* simultaneously.

According to the protocol in the *Gurdwara*, the number one person is the *Guru* and the number two person is his minister, the *Granthi Sahib* who sits in the service of the *Guru Granth Sahib* during the function. Accordingly, the *Panj Pyaras*, who represent the *Guru*,

are given *Parshad* first. Then it is given to the Granthi Sahib (Not to the Guru Granth Sahib). As he attends the Granth Sahib, he cannot take *Parshad* in his hands. It is placed near him in a bowl. Later on, *Parshad* is given to all the *Sangat*.

## (B) LANGAR

### 12. Does Langar always have to be Indian foods?

No. All foods are acceptable. Chapati, bread, pizza, sandwiches, doughnuts, corn flakes, potato chips, vegetables, pulses, etc., can be served in Langar.

**However, no meat is allowed to be served in Langar.** Only vegetarian foods of any kind acceptable to the people can be served in the Langar.

Use of meat is prohibited because every religion has its own method of sanctifying it or not eating it at all. Muslims prepare Halal meat; Jews prepare Kosher. Muslims don't eat pork at all and Hindus don't eat beef. Similarly, Christians and Jews are also prohibited from eating certain kinds of meat on certain days. Jews are forbidden to eat pork. Roman Catholics eat only fish on Fridays and during lent. Sikhs are not allowed to eat Halal. Some people do not eat meat at all. They are strict vegetarians all the time.

Langar is meant for people of all religions and all beliefs. A particular kind of meat or a particular method of preparation will suit only a limited number of people and not all of the *Sangat*. Most of the people in

the *Sangat*, therefore, will not be able to eat Langar if meat is served there. To welcome all people on all the days, only vegetarian Langar is permitted. Meat is totally prohibited from being cooked or served in the Langar. Eggs and fish are also considered a kind of meat and hence, are not allowed in Langar.

There is one more condition for a Langar to be served to the *Sangat*. All people have to be served without any discrimination and without any obligation to anyone. All are entitled to equal distribution. Special foods cannot be reserved for influential people in the *Sangat* or in the organization.

**13. Those who serve Langar bend constantly. It is hard to do that. They step on things, spilling food on the floor. Wouldn't it be easier to sit at tables?**

Food can be served while sitting on the floor or at tables and chairs. There is no restriction how the *Sangat* sits to eat food. The principle involved is equality for all. If everyone cannot be provided with chairs and tables, let all enjoy together sitting on the ground. Traditionally, Sikhs have been sitting on the floor to eat Langar. This has been popular because it helps in serving a large number of people quickly and the people sitting feel humble before the Guru. The feeling of being higher than others is removed by this method. Hence, this method is prevalent even today in the West where Sikhs can provide chairs to all the people but still choose to sit on the floor.

Serving Langar to the *Pangat* sitting on floor looks hard only because we are not accustomed to doing that. If we go to Amritsar or Anandpur Sahib, we will see thousands of people being served Langar while sitting on the floor. We too have to learn the technique and get used to it. It gives a greater feeling of unity and equality while sitting together like that and eating Langar. In some Gurdwaras in the West, they have introduced chairs and tables for eating Langar. We cannot say that this is a wrong method. However, it is not a restaurant where eating food is the objective and chairs are needed to sit on. Partaking of Langar is a part of our religious practice of sharing food with the members. Sitting on the floor has its own charm and

pleasure; it sends the proper message to visitors of being humble in the presence of the Guru.

**14. When Sikhs are allowed to eat meat, why is it not served in Langar? Is it because we “feed” Langar to the Guru Granth Sahib.**

- **Are Sikhs supposed to be vegetarian or not? Is it mentioned anywhere in the Guru Granth Sahib? Why do some Sikhs kill animals to eat them? Animals are things who deserve to live like us.**

(i) The question has already been answered above. Books have been written on the controversy of whether Sikhs should eat meat or not. The following will help the reader to make his choice.

According to the Sikh *Reht*, published by the Shiromani Committee, Amritsar, a Sikh is not allowed to eat *Kutha* (*Halal* meat prepared by Muslim religious rites). About other kinds of meat, the *Reht* booklet is silent. The silence is taken to mean that eating meat other than *Halal* is not prohibited.

*Gurbani* tells us that the claim of vegetarians to be superior or holier persons than nonvegetarians does not stand the test of logic. A vegetarian eats grains and all grains have life. The grains grow to multiply their species like other living beings. We drink water which is the cause of all life on this earth and contains many living organisms. Drinking of water has to be given up by those who claim that they are perfect vegetarians. People consume milk which is not a

vegetarian product; it comes from animals. Therefore, such persons cannot claim to be strictly vegetarian. The futility of arguing over this issue is mentioned in *Gurbani* in the following words:

ਮਾਸੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਝਗੜੇ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਣੈ॥

ਕਉਣੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਉਣੁ ਸਾਗੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ਕਿਸੁ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਪੁ ਸਮਾਣੈ॥ Page 1289

Only a fool argues whether to eat meat or not. Who can define what is meat and what is not meat? Who knows where the sin lies, being a vegetarian or a nonvegetarian?

(ii) Sikhs do not 'feed' Langar to the Guru Granth Sahib as is assumed when Langar is brought in a plate and placed in front of the Guru Granth Sahib before *Ardas*. Bringing Langar in front of the Guru Granth Sahib and touching it with the *kirpan* is not approved by the *Gurmat Reht*. Brahmans offer food to their gods before they eat it themselves. 'Feeding' Langar to the Guru Granth Sahib before distributing it to the *Sangat* is a copy of the Brahmanical ritual. It needs to be given up by those who happen to practice it out of ignorance.



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# **PART II**

**ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS  
ASKED IN THE**

**EAST.**



## Chapter VI

# AMRIT REHT AND KHALSA PANTH

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### 1. Is it necessary to partake of *Amrit*? If we do not, who are we, Khalsa or what?

(i) Yes, for becoming a Sikh, a member of the Khalsa Panth, one has to partake of *Amrit*.

The question is answered in detail in Chapter III. Briefly, it may be restated here that to enter any political party or a religion one has to undergo a ceremony. For being a member of a party or school, one has to fill a form and sign it as a token of accepting its principles and discipline. Similarly, for being a member of a faith, there is a religious ceremony, *Sunnat* for a Muslim, *Janju* (sacred thread) for a Hindu, baptism for a Christian and *Amrit* for a Sikh. **In this aspect Sikhs are no way different from other major faiths.** Even Guru Gobind Rai himself took *Amrit* and became the first member of the Khalsa Panth admitted by the *Panj Pyaras*. If *Amrit* is a requirement for even the Guru to join the Panth, it surely is a requirement for every Sikh to join the Panth.

Anyone who wants to be a member of the Sikh Panth has to partake of *Amrit* and abide by the code of conduct (*Reht*) told at that time.

(ii) The Khalsa Panth has, however, no franchise on *Gurbani* or *Gurmat*, the Sikh way of life. Anyone, a Hindu, a Muslim or a member of any other faith or none, can read, practice and take advantage of *Gurbani*. One can live his/her life accordingly without being a formal member of the Panth (without partaking of *Amrit*).

To give an example, one can be a very good player without being a member of any team. One may not be a formal member of the Panth but may be living the model life of a devotee mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib. Goodness and holiness are not reserved for the *Amritdhari* people only. A Muslim, a Hindu or a *Sehjdhari* too, may be a good and a holy person. ***Being holy and good, however, does not mean that a person becomes a member of the Panth.***

(iii) There is another aspect of this question as well. ***A person looking like a Sikh, knowing Gurbani and keeping long hair covered with a turban, may not be a Sikh.*** The head of the Radha Swami and some of his followers may be mistaken for a Sikh which they are not. They declare themselves to be Radha Swami (not Sikhs). Similar is the case with false Nirankaris (who look like Sikhs but disclaim to be Sikh) and Communists (who do not believe in God and claim not to belong to any religion).

Any person can claim to be a Sikh and follow the *Reht* to the extent one can, provided one believes in the ten Gurus, the Guru Granth and the *Amrit* ceremony started by Guru Gobind Singh. Anyone who becomes a Sikh cannot practice any other faith, may it be Hinduism, Christianity, Yoga, or the recent groups including Radha Swamis, false Nirankaris or Communists. For being identified as a formal member of the Panth taking *Amrit* is an essential requirement.

Before taking *Amrit*, one may be of any faith (Hindu, Muslim, etc.) or of none. One may be a child of a Sikh or a *Sehjdhari*. *Sehjdhari* is one who believes only in the Sikh faith but has not become its formal member, that is, one who is on one's way to take *Amrit*. For example, a medical student is a student-doctor but not a doctor until he gets through the graduation ceremony. A *Sehjdhari* is a student-Sikh, who is living like a Sikh. A *Sehjdhari* is expected to partake of *Amrit* as and when an *Amrit* ceremony is available to him.

**2. Is it necessary for a Sikh to take *Amrit*? If we don't take *Amrit* can we still be considered close to the Guru Ji?**

Yes, to be a Sikh one has to join the Sikh Panth, and for this, as stated above, one is required to go through the *Amrit* ceremony. It is a promise made voluntarily, willingly and sincerely in the presence of the *Panj Pyaras*, to live the life of a Sikh. The person is told about the Do's and Don'ts to be observed by an *Amritdhari* Sikh.

Taking *Amrit* means making a public promise to join the Khalsa Panth, to live a right kind of virtuous life of *sewa-Simran* and remain free from vices. If one wants to benefit from being close to the Guru, one must obey the command of the Guru and then why should one hesitate to take *Amrit*? Some persons are reluctant to take *Amrit* because it means commitment to recite *Gurbani* regularly, live according to its directions, and not to do wrong actions.

***It should be made clear that one cannot, on his own, declare himself to be a Sikh , a Muslim, a Hindu or a Christian.*** Every faith has an obligatory ceremony for a child (see answer to Question #1 above) to enter the faith of his/her parents. Having been born in a faith, one does not automatically become a member of the faith. In the Sikh faith, the ceremony is performed when one can practice the faith and can read *Gurbani* to understand and follow it. As a matter of principle, one born in a Sikh family is expected to take *Amrit* anytime before marriage, which is to be performed according to Sikh rites.

If a Christian, a Muslim, or a Hindu keeps long hair, does not smoke or drink, reads *Gurbani* and gives contributions to a Gurdwara, he cannot on his own declare himself to be a Sikh, a member of the Panth. To join the Panth, he or she has to take *Amrit*. A best player cannot himself claim to be a member of a team unless he joins the team and wears the uniform of the team.

**How to be close to the Guru?** Guru is a spiritual light to guide all seekers to the holy path. No one has a franchise on the Guru or God. Everyone, whatever

his faith, may be close to the Guru to the extent one desires to be. It is not the physical closeness which matters; it actually means how much you listen to the Guru and how much you obey him. The two sons of Guru Nanak Dev were, of course, physically very close to the Guru but did not listen to him, hence they were spiritually away from him. Bhai Lehna Jee, a devotee of a Hindu goddess, became a disciple of the Guru. He listened to the Guru and obeyed him; as a result he became the Guru himself.

*Gurbani*, the living spirit of the Gurus, is with us. To be close to the Gurus, we may recite it, listen to it and follow it. This is the way to be in touch with the Gurus and enjoy their sermons.

### **3. What is the next step after you partake of Amrit?**

This is a very interesting question. Obviously, when one partakes of *Amrit* he/she becomes a member of the Khalsa and promises to live his/her life according to the *Khalsa Reht*. There are some misunderstandings about "What is *Amrit*? What does it mean to be an *Amritdhari*?" It needs to be explained here.

*Amrit* is an ancient word used in different forms all over the world but means the same thing, some holy liquid the drinking of which keeps death away. Hindu gods are supposed to have taken it and that is why they are to "live" forever. Guru Nanak says this is simply a myth. There is no other *Amrit* except God's Name. Actually those people (their souls) should be

considered alive who drink God's Name (love God and always keep Him in their mind). Those who ignore Father God, they (their souls) should be considered dead.

ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ॥ Page 9

In the concluding hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Arjan Dev tells us that the whole of *Gurbani* is *Amrit*, God's Name.

ਬਾਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਤਿੰਨਿ ਵਸਤੂ ਪਈਓ ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੋ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਕਾ ਪਇਓ ਜਿਸਕਾ ਸਭਸੁ ਅਧਾਰੋ॥ Page 1429

What we call "partaking of *Amrit*" is actually "partaking of *Khanda Bata Pahul*". The ceremony includes making a devotee take the sanctified water and say *Waheguru*, God's Name adopted by the Sikhs. A Sikh is told to read *Gurbani* regularly and love God (*Naam Simran*).

There is a code of conduct an *Amritdhari* is required to follow. It helps him to live an honest, humble and virtuous life. It is a good moral life which a Sikh enjoys. He keeps away from unsocial acts and vices. Thus the "next step" after one partakes of *Amrit* is to enjoy living an upright and truthful life, and also keep away from immoral and wrong paths.. (For details of do's and don'ts for a Sikh, please see *Sikhism, A Universal Message* published by the Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, Vancouver, Canada, or *Sikh Reht Maryada* published by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Amritsar).

- 4. I am very unsure of why growing hair is a must for a Sikh. Is there any special motive behind it or is it an order?**



- **Is it a breach of faith to have short hair?**
- **What part do the five Kakaars play in our life?**

(i) The answer is given in Chapter III (questions 913). Briefly it may be stated that maintaining uncut hair is a part of the 5K uniform of a Sikh who is required to keep these *articles of faith* as a symbol of his/her identity, and his/her mission in life.

*If a religion involved only individual concerns, one would need no form or ceremonies. Sikhism is a mission which requires one to be a noble person and work together as an organization to serve people. For maintaining discipline and spirit of service, called **esprit de corps**, use of such devices as flags, drills, and uniforms among the members of an organization like the army, police and scouts, has been in common use for a long time.*

Guru Gobind Singh, in founding the Khalsa, the Sikh Panth, required the 5K uniform to be worn by every member of the Khalsa, *Akal Purkh ki Fauj*, the Legions of the Lord.

Sometimes it is said *Kesh* (hair) are natural and they preserve energy. *kirpan* helps to protect us from bad people. These answers are intellectual explanations to justify the utility of the 5K's. Such answers are not the basic reasons to wear the 5K uniform. They may be called advantages or benefits of keeping them. We wear clothes as a matter of our good culture. They have the additional advantage of protecting us from weather. Even when we have the

best weather and we don't need to wear clothes, still we wear some clothes as a social requirement. Similarly, wearing the 5K uniform is a religious requirement for a Sikh, a member of the Khalsa Panth. Of course, like clothes, they have other benefits too.

(ii) By not keeping uncut hair, one discards the discipline of the Khalsa code and loses one's right to claim one's membership in the Panth. In the same way, someone who takes off the team uniform can no longer play as a member of the team, even though he continues to be a good player.

(iii) The 5K uniform is a requirement for a member of the Khalsa Panth, just as every member of a team has to wear the uniform prescribed for the team. The uniform provides identity, unity, and motivation for the members in achieving the mission of the team. The 5K's have the same significance for the members of the Khalsa Panth.

**5. During social parties and celebrations, is drinking alcohol in small amounts allowed?**

The answer is NO. For details see chapter II question 5.

**6. Can an *Amritdhari*, (i)wear earrings, (ii)eat meat?**

• **Why don't we do the full Rehras at the Samelan (Johor Bahru, Malaysia, 1994 meet)?**

(a) (i) The answer is NO. According to the *Reht Maryada*, a Sikh is not permitted to pierce his/her ears. Therefore, a Sikh is welcome to wear jewellery which does not require piercing of the ear, nose, lip or any other part of the body. According to an old custom, a guru, to accept and identify his *chela* or disciple would put an earring in his ear. An *Amritdhari* is not a *chela* of any individual guru, *sant*, or a member of any group; therefore, he/she does not need to pierce the ear and wear earrings to identify with that individual or group. Today, it has become a fashion or rather a fad. Once in a while we may see a person with as many as seven holes in the ear, and even with pierced lips and navels. See also chapter III question 11.

(ii) Eating meat should not be an issue for a Sikh. Discussing the question of eating or not eating meat is futile. One does not know where the sin lies. Here is a quotation from *Gurbani*:

ਮਾਸੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਝਗੜੇ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਣੈ॥ ਕਉਣੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਉਣੁ  
ਸਾਗੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ਕਿਸੁ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਪੁ ਸਮਾਣੈ॥ Page 1289

For details see chapter III question 2.

(b) We do full *Rehras* at the Samelan. We do not add anything on our own to it to make it longer than that constituted by the Guru and thereby make people believe it to be better. Any addition on our own does

not make *Rehras* more correct, rather it breaks the uniformity of our prayers.

For details regarding when and why additions to the *Rehras* were made out of ignorance, see Chapter II question 8.

**7. "*Reht pyari mujh ko, sikh pyara nah*". What does it mean?**

The statement stresses the need of living like a Sikh and following the Sikh code of conduct sincerely, and not just appearing as a Sikh outwardly.

In English, they say: "Handsome is what handsome does". One is valued for what one does and how one behaves. If one appears good but does not do good, that person is not to be considered good.

The Guru says that one is loved by him not because one looks like a Sikh but because one lives a good moral life as desired by the Sikh *Reht*.

We use this statement to motivate Sikhs to practice *Reht* to love God, to recite *Gurbani*, to live honestly, to share one's earnings and to wish well for all humanity. Doing all this, one also feels self-esteem in maintaining the 5K uniform of a Sikh. If any Sikh is found ignoring this kind of life, he is reminded of the duties and requirements of a Sikh by repeating the above statement. A Sikh is made to feel that it is the character and virtues of a Sikh which makes him acceptable to the Guru and also acceptable to God.

**8. Guru Nanak said to the Brahman, "Will this thread make me a better person?" I ask now**

**about the 5k's "Will they make me a better person?"**

The answer is very simple. **Can one become a policeman by wearing the uniform of a policeman? Is a policeman permitted to perform his duty without wearing the uniform?**

We all know one does not become a policeman by wearing the uniform, yet a policeman has to wear his uniform to reveal his identity and explain his mission. Just wearing the 5K's will make no difference if the person has no commitment for the faith. However, a faithful person has to wear the 5K's to reveal his identity and his mission (as mentioned in *Reht Maryada*).

Guru Nanak said that it is the spirit and honesty with which you perform an action that matters. A Sikh has to commit himself to a certain prescribed way of life and honestly follow it. Guru says such a person will be saved. If a person puts on *Janju* or keeps long hair or anything else just to show that he is a faithful person but actually he does not have any commitment for the faith, it will not make him a better person.

The Brahmans performed the ceremony to get money from the people for their services, and were not concerned about advising them of the path of truth. Further, the Brahman was getting donations from the people in the name of their dead parents. They were told that their ancestors would be benefited by every thing given to the Brahmans. Unfortunately some Sikhs under that old custom now

treat Sikh preachers as Brahmans and give donations to them (or the Gurdwara) with a wrong hope that it will benefit their ancestors. **This is not endorsed by Gurbani.**

Wearing a thread and giving money to the Brahman has as such no virtue. Similarly just putting on the 5k's and giving money to the Sikh priest has no virtue. However a Sikh, being a Policeman for Peace (*Akal Purkh Ki Fauj*), is to follow a virtuous life and to put on the uniform for the reasons a policeman or a player wears his uniform. Even the best players have to put on the uniform prescribed for the team to play as a member of the team. To be a member of the Panth, a Sikh, while living the right kind of life, has also to put on the 5K uniform.

Also see the answers to Questions 1,4,7,9 of this chapter.

**9. In which line in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is it written that we must wear six to seven yards of turban?**

(i) The answer to the question can best be understood by bringing another question to our mind, "On which page in the book *"Rules of the Hockey Game"*, is the uniform of a hockey team described?" All of us know the answer is "nowhere". **It describes only the rules and regulations of the hockey game and is not expected to prescribe the uniforms of the teams who want to play the game.** That choice, we know, lies with the organizers of the team.

Sri Guru Granth describes the mission of human life and teaches us how to achieve that. Anyone and

everyone, of whatever faith one may be, is welcome to take advantage of the directions and guidance for leading one's life on the path described in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

In 1699 Guru Gobind Rai founded, Khalsa Panth, a "team" of the Sikhs under the "captainship" of the *Panj Pyaras* and ordered them to wear the 5K uniform, which includes the wearing of the turban to cover one's head. One has a choice to be a member of the Sikh Panth or not. If one chooses to be a member, uncut hair and turban come with the choice.

Wearing a turban is not the invention of the Guru; this practice is as old as the written history of mankind. It will interest the readers to know that the Old Testament mentions the requirement of tying turbans by the priests. "Once they enter the gates of the inner Court, they are to wear linen vestments, they shall wear linen turban and linen drawers on their loins." Old Test. Ezekiel 44:18-19. Even in the West, in the so-called advanced culture which does not always respect traditional values, a bride at the time of her marriage still feels honored to cover her head and face by a veil. The requirement of covering one's head is not peculiar to Sikh faith; it is an old worldwide culture of the civilized people.

(ii) *Gurbani* is concerned only with describing the mission of human life and guiding the followers to achieve that goal. It enlightens the holy path for all of humanity and tells us how to follow it. It teaches us how to take advantage of the gift of human life and enjoy it. In simple words, *Gurbani*, the sacred

scripture, guides all human beings to identify with their Lord (Father and Mother of all people) and thus help them to fulfill themselves by loving Her/Him. *Gurbani* guides all of us, not just Sikhs alone, for this union.

We, Sikhs, have been designated as the *Akal Purkh ki Fauj* and were given our 5K uniform including the turban. We wear it not just because we believe in *Gurbani* (non-Sikhs, also believe in the teachings of the Guru Granth. See *Sikhism: A Universal Faith*, pages 37-39) but because we are all members of the Khalsa Panth whose membership requires both males and females to keep their heads covered.

Sikhs wear shirts, pants and other clothes, not because it is written in Sri Guru Granth, but because it is a part of the culture of civilized human beings. They wear turbans and maintain the 5K's, not because it is mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib but because it is a requirement for members of the Panth.

Police, army, and sportsmen all have their uniform to identify them and remind them of their mission. They enjoy wearing their uniform. **Similarly Sikhs enjoy wearing the 5K's, which includes the turban as their identity and honour. It reminds them of their mission.**

**10."A man with a bottle in hand might be better than another with a Bible in his hand" I express that inner sincerity is much more important than external hypocrisy.**



Holding a Bible in hand does not make one a priest or a holy person and neither does holding a bottle mean one is an alcoholic. *The statement more often is used as a phrase meaning hypocrisy is bad, and it is worse if practised by the people claiming to be religious persons. **This meaning is understandable and acceptable.*** The message that one should be sincerely what one appears to be, is very emphatically mentioned in this statement.

*However, this phrase cannot be and should not be used to justify drinking by those who claim to be sincere and otherwise good in their heart. **It is not okay for nice people to love bottles.*** Sikhs are specifically prohibited from drinking alcohol (See Chapter II Question 5).

Unfortunately, more often the wrong conclusion is drawn from this statement: that drinking is not a bad thing provided one is sincere on the inside. Many people who believe this actually cheat themselves. They usually acquire the habit of drinking and later become alcoholics. Those who drink regularly agree that they got into that habit for the fun of it and now find it difficult to stop.

If we analyze the statement as such, the conclusion we arrive at is that *"inner sincerity is more important than external hypocrisy". Everyone would agree to its correctness. **If one wants to understand from this statement that "a man with a bottle is not wrong", he is heading for trouble.*** It includes a basically incorrect assumption that men with bottles are good people because they are the same inside and outside while those with the Bible are cheats

because they are bad in their hearts while appearing to be holy.

Faking is bad wherever it is. Any person including a holy man who is fake is wrong. This is accepted by everyone. The other part of the assumption that alcoholics are good people is also wrong. Alcoholics cannot help drinking and losing control of their senses. Drinking is a vice, hence, good people avoid it.

At the same time we cannot say that all those who drink are bad people. This is not the only habit by which one should be judged. Alcoholism is now mentioned as a disease which takes over some people. The best policy is to keep away from the bottle and to remain free from risk of the disease.

### **11. How can you make someone who smokes and drinks to stop and take *Amrit*?**

Let us presume there are two persons, Me and U, and the latter smokes. Here is how *Gurbani* guides us:

(i) ਹਮ ਨਹੀ ਚੰਗੇ ਬੁਰਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ॥ Page 728

(ii) ਪ੍ਰਥਮੈ ਮਨੁ ਪਰਬੋਧੈ ਅਪਨਾ, ਪਾਛੈ ਅਵਰ ਰੀਤਾਵੈ॥ Page 381

The English phrase says, "Physician, heal thy self." We people are not saints; every one of us has some shortcomings. When we see some weakness in others, we think they are "bad" people. Every one of us has some shortcomings. However, usually each one of us claims to be a "good" person and others to be "bad" persons. *Gurbani* tells us not to be caught in

this net of ego. We know that Mr. U smokes and Mr. Me does not smoke. Maybe Mr. U is very humble and helpful to the people, while Mr. Me is haughty and has little regard for others. Each will go on calling the other person "bad" or "wrong".

The correct approach is that one tries to live a right kind of life and radiate peace, humbleness, and sweetness through his living to motivate others to practice a similar kind of life.

An actual situation will explain this. A clerk who was a heavy smoker, was shifted to another office. He was welcomed to his new office by his boss, "I am proud of you. You are very efficient and your writing is very clean and neat. I am happy to have you with us. I know your wife is not well. Whenever you have to do something at home, just go; you do not need formal permission, just leave a note, and let me know if I can do anything for you".

In response, the clerk, who usually argued with his previous boss, became very respectful towards his new boss. He always said "yes" to him. Further, he gave up smoking because he knew his boss, being a Sikh, did not appreciate anybody smoking in the office.

Every situation needs a separate approach towards a smoker. The principle to be kept in mind is that you should always respect the personal identity of an individual. If you are a friend of the smoker, you may start like this, "I like you for your good nature, affectionate behaviour and cooperative nature. However, I am not able to bear your smoking. I do not

want my friend to lose his health and waste his money in smoke..."

Social psychology says if you are in the company of smokers, you are very likely to start smoking. In the company of nonsmokers, a smoker will give up smoking to conform with his peers. The best thing one can do for a smoking friend is to provide him with good company and keep him away from the smokers. This will motivate the person to give up smoking. The decision has to be made by him on his own and is not to be forced on him by his friends.

**12. What do you mean by "*Raj Karega Khalsa Aki Reheh Na Ko*"? Who is going to do Raj?**

This optimistic slogan, now sung in Gurdwaras at the end of every function, was given to the Sikhs during the early 18th century. Indian rulers were after the blood of the Sikhs. The Sikhs wanted to assure human rights for all people and to protect these rights, if need be, with the use of their sword. The government wanted to finish the Sikhs totally and they made a law which provided rewards for those who helped arrest or kill a Sikh. Anyone could kill a Sikh, chop off his head and exchange it for about one year's wages at the local police station.

The Sikhs were, therefore, obliged to leave their homes and live in deserts, forests or hills where it was difficult for the army to locate them. They lived in groups, *jathas*, so that they could jointly protect themselves if they had to face the soldiers.

During this period the Sikhs coined the above rhyme to boost their morale and keep them in good spirits. Later on during World War II, Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, adopted this philosophy. When Germany was crushing European defenses and bombing London, Churchill coined a slogan: "Victory to the Allies." To remind each other of this slogan, people posted V signs everywhere. Also, whenever they met each other, they raised their forefinger and middle finger to make a V sign to assure each other of their victory. Finally, the Allies did win.

Sikhs sung the slogan "The Khalsa shall Rule", to protect the human rights of the weak with the support of God. They did achieve their mission before the end of the century when in 1799 Ranjit Singh took over Lahore, the capital of Panjab, and became the maharaja of the state. This slogan is our heritage, and a part of our golden history. We, therefore, sing this rhyme after the prayers at the end of a Gurdwara function or other religious functions. The Sikhs should continue to do so in future to remind them of their glorious past and prosperous future.

Only the following three couplets were approved by the Panth to be sung after the prayers as is the *Maryada* at the Akal Takhat, Amritsar.

ਆਗਿਆ ਭਈ ਅਕਾਲ ਕੀ ਤਭੈ ਚਲਾਇਓ ਪੰਥ॥  
ਸਭ ਸਿਖਨ ਕਉ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਗੁੰਥਿ॥

ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁੰਥ ਜੀ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹ॥  
ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੋ ਮਿਲਬੋ ਚਹੈ ਖੋਜ ਸਬਦ ਮਹਿ ਲੇਹਿ॥

ਰਾਜ ਕਰੇਗਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਆਕੀ ਰਹੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ॥  
ਖੁਆਰ ਹੋਇ ਸਭ ਮਿਲੇਗੇ ਬਚੇ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ॥

They speak of Granth, Panth and their rule. Additional rhymes dilute this philosophy and are therefore **not to be sung along with these three couplets** after the prayer.

**13. Why do weapons play an important role in our religion? Is it not an act against peace?**

• **What does the *Khanda* mean?**

(i) Wearing a weapon is an act of peace provided it is worn by people who are entitled to do that. ***Every country has policemen wearing weapons. They are for peace and not against peace.*** To stop violence by armed thugs there is no other way but the use of weapons. Hence, there is an old saying: "If you want peace, be prepared for war."

Sikhs are a nation who want peace for all, including the weak; they need weapons to protect the rights of the helpless. Sikh history is filled with Sikh sacrifices for protecting people from terrorism committed by state authority and looting invaders. Hence, weapons play an important role in their faith.

*kirpan* is a symbol of traditional weapons and is included as one of the 5K's to be worn by a Sikh.

(ii) The logo called *Khanda* is a unique way of depicting two *Kirpans*, a *chakar* and a *khanda* as one composition. As *Khanda* is the main central arm, with

*Kirpans* placed around it, the logo is also called *Khanda*. This is just placing the three popular Sikh arms in an organised way. ***Any significance attached to any of the three constituents of the logo is an intellectual invention to search for an unneeded justification.*** Some persons say *Chakar* represents God because like God, *Chakar* has no beginning and no end. This is an incorrect interpretation of the logo. By usage, it has become a logo of the Sikh nation, the way the Cross is accepted as a symbol of Christianity. Sikhs want peace, if need be by the use of weapons, hence this logo of traditional weapons put together in an artistic design.

## Chapter VII

# PHILOSOPHY OF THE SIKH FAITH

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1. **How did Guru Nanak manage to form the Sikh Religion when Islam was the top religion in the world at that time?**

Guru Nanak Dev did not found one more faith but revealed the faith for humanity, a faith for all people. H. L. Bradshaw writes in *The Sikh Review*, Calcutta: **"Sikhism is a Universal world faith, a message for all men. Sikhs must cease to think of their faith as just another good religion and must begin to think in terms of Sikhism being the religion for this New Age..."**

Other scholars have also observed the same thing, but in different words, that a common God for all of humanity was revealed and preached by Guru Nanak Dev. Earlier, there was a "God" who accepted only good Christians to Heaven while another "God" accepted only good Muslims there. There was one



more "God" who loved only high caste Hindus; other Indians were considered low caste and untouchable. Further, the low caste were considered not entitled to enter Heaven after death and they were not permitted to enter a Hindu religious place here on this earth. Unfortunately, this situation, prevails even today.

Thus followers of each faith believed that unless one belonged to their faith one could not be accepted by God in His Heaven. In simple words, every religion claimed a franchise on God, and preached that people of other faiths are not entitled to Heaven created by "their" God for them.

In 1499, coming out of the river Bein after three days, Guru Nanak Dev told people, both Hindus and Muslims, who came to greet him: "*Na koi Hindu, na Musalman*". The Guru, thus, explained that God does not identify us as Hindus or Muslims or as members of any other faith. He judges us only by our deeds. Everyone who loves God, realizes God.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ॥ Page 8

God can be loved by any name Ram, Allah, Guru, Gobind. These and many other Names are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh scripture contains hymns written by six Gurus and more than two dozen holy persons including those born in low caste, Hindu and Muslim faiths. Farid was a Muslim and loved God as Allah. Ravidas was a shoemaker, a low caste, an untouchable.

*Gurbani* preaches that God is our common Father. He loves all people whatever their faith. We are valued in His Court not by the name we adopt to

love Him but by the deeds we do to serve people. Many scholars have observed that the Sikh faith is the message for the whole world. **These principles made people embrace the Sikh faith against many odds.**

Hindus and Muslims who accepted the above teachings of Guru Nanak Dev were welcomed to sit together for the first time as equals and were named *Sangat*. Later in 1699, after training for two centuries to live that kind of life, Guru Gobind Singh revealed Khalsa Panth, an organization to serve people and protect their human rights. They were required to partake of *Amrit*, wear the 5K's and adopt new names (Singh for a male, Kaur for a female). We call that organised body Guru Khalsa Panth, Sikh Panth or simply Sikhs.

The rulers did not like people adopting the Sikh faith. They tried to stop this wave started by Guru Nanak Dev. Guru Arjun Dev was arrested and tortured to death. His son, Guru Har Gobind was attacked four times by the army of the Governor of Lahore. Guru Teg Bahadur was arrested along with his three associates. They all were tortured and murdered. Guru Gobind Singh was attacked repeatedly. He sacrificed his family, his mother and all of his four sons. Thousands of Sikhs died fighting for their right. Guru Gobind Singh was himself stabbed to death.

The Khalsa continued to resist state tyranny while living a truthful life and serving people. **As a result, Sikhs and the Sikh faith were accepted by the common man;** the Sikhs, supported both by Hindus

and Muslims, became rulers of the Panjab when Maharaja Ranjit Singh took over Lahore in 1799.

**2. Is not Sikhism just another religion? Don't all religions preach the path to God?**

- **Why did Guru Teg Bahadur sacrifice his life for the Hindus, when Sikhism does not encourage the practice of Hindu rituals?**

See also question 1 above for the answer to the first part of the question.

(a) According to the popular perception, religions may be divided into two groups on the bases of the definition of God and the mission of human life:

(i) God can be realised through our faith alone. Unless you belong to our faith you will go to Hell. The only key to the Heaven is with our prophet. For entering Heaven, people must accept our faith.

(ii) God is Father/Mother of all people and loves every human being; He/She belongs to everyone, believers (whatever their faith) and nonbelievers. There is no place called "Heaven" into which people of a particular faith only would be allowed. Anyone, who loves God, by whatever Name Allah, Ram, Hari, Guru, Jesus etc., lives in Heaven (while living in this world) and realizes God.

There is also a third group,(it includes Buddhism and Jainism) who do not require belief in the existence of God. This group is not included in this discussion.

**Sikhism alone** belongs to group (ii). Hence, it is basically different from all faiths. **Other faiths**, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, belong to group (i).

While followers of other religions wish to reach Heaven, Sikhism says Heaven or Hell are not physical places where the souls are destined to go after people die. The devotees who love God and “see” Him pervading everywhere enjoy “True Heaven” while living here in this world. They have no desire for an assumed place called Heaven. *Gurbani* says this in the following hymn.

ਸੁਰਗ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਸਭਿ ਬਾਛਹਿ ਨਿਤਿ ਆਸਾ ਆਸ ਕਰੀਜੈ।

ਹਰਿ ਦਰਸਨ ਕੇ ਜਨ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਮਾਗਹਿ, ਮਿਲਿ ਦਰਸਨ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਿ ਮਨੁ ਧੀਜੈ।

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Thus, *Gurbani* explains that when we love God, and sing His virtues, we are in Heaven. When we turn our back to Him and get involved in lust, ego, greed, anger, etc., we suffer Hell here in this very life:

ਕਹੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਇਹ ਕਹੀਐ ਕਾਹਿ॥ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੈ ਆਹਿ॥ Page 325

ਨਰਕਿ ਪਰਹਿ ਤੇ ਮਾਨਈ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਉਦਾਸ॥ Page 1369

Sikhism does not claim exclusive rights to God. It accepts that God belongs to everyone, believers and nonbelievers. Anyone, a Hindu, a Muslim, etc., who loves Him realizes Him.

Let us understand that morality and ethics (one should be truthful, sincere, humble, and helpful) are the same in all faiths. Rituals have little value. It is the definition of God and the mission of human life which determine the nature of a faith.

To explain this: in any government, be it a republic, a dictatorship, or a kingship, people doing good deeds are honored and those committing wrong actions are punished. However, the three governments have different kinds of constitutions and permit different human rights to their citizens. Similarly, morality and ethics are basically the same in all religions but they differ regarding the definition of God and the mission of human life. *Other religions claim a franchise on God and His "Heaven" while Sikhism teaches He is our common Father; we all are equal in His Court.*

(b) Sikh faith recognizes the right of every human being to love God by any name and by any method one likes. No one, not even a king, has a right to force one's own chosen Name or method to love God on people of other faiths. In Guru Granth Sahib all the names of the Almighty, whether adopted by Hindus, Muslims, or Yogis were accepted as His Names to be loved by people according to their choice.

Guru Teg Bahadur protested against state oppression, which included the threat of death, to forcibly convert Hindus to Islam. He sacrificed his life **to protect the human rights of the people** to remember God by any Name, Ram or Krishan, they love. **This is the basic principle a Sikh is to believe and practice, and for which the Guru offered his head.** Thinking that the Guru gave his life to protect the religion of Hindus is belittling his sacrifice.

**3. How can I see any of the Gurus? How can the Gurus come down to meet us here?**

The Gurus are here, we have only to know that they are here with us all the time. Read this:

ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ, ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ॥

ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਾਪਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ॥ Page 982

*Gurbani* in Sri Guru Granth is the living spirit of the Gurus. When you read or listen to *Gurbani*, the Guru is talking to you and you are hearing the actual words of the Guru. *Gurbani* are words of the Guru in written form. The physical body of the Guru, of course, is not there. Anyway, the physical body was not the Guru; the word spoken by the Guru, *Gurbani*, is our Guru, according to the philosophy of *Shabad* Guru. That is why we bow to the Guru Granth Sahib.

Please remember that whatever the Gurus preached, it was recorded in words and passed on by them to us as Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Gurus don't have to come down to us. They did not leave us. They are with us. Enjoy "talking" to the Gurus and listening to them through *Gurbani*.

**4. I have heard and read there are other Masters/Gurus who can help us to reach liberation/mukti. These people have experienced God and by following them, one may experience God, too. These people may be Sikhs (*sants*) or from other religions. Is this true? If so, are we as Sikhs allowed to follow these people?**

(i) The key part of the question is: "Are we, as Sikhs, allowed to follow these people?" The answer is a firm "NO". A Sikh is a person who believes in the Guruship of the Guru Granth and Guru Panth. **He/she is admitted to the Panth only by Panj Pyaras** and they alone are entitled to administer *Nam Amrit* to the Sikhs. A Sikh is not to get *Nam* from any individual who claims to be a guru, a *Sant* or a *Brahmgiani* (He who has experienced God), not even from any **one Amritdhari** Sikh.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded Guru Khalsa Panth and handed over the Guruship to the *Panj Pyaras* those first five Sikhs who offered their heads in love of their faith. It is then that Guru Gobind Rai, after partaking of *Amrit* from them, became Gobind Singh. Thus, he accepted the authority of the *Panj Pyara* system to give *Amrit* to the disciples (admit people to the Sikh Panth) and give them religious instructions. This historical event is well known to all the world.

Today, if anyone, a child of a Sikh or a nonSikh, wants to become a Sikh, he/she must appear before the *Panj Pyaras* (not before any individual, not even before a person who claims to be Godincarnate), accept *Amrit* and agree to live according to the Sikh *Reht Maryada* (Sikh Code of Conduct). According to it, a Sikh can listen to no spiritual guidance other than that given by the five *Amritdhari* Sikhs, the *Pyaras* deputed for the job.

(ii) To answer the other aspect of the question, let us first be clear that a person is not a member of the Khalsa Panth, a Sikh, unless he partakes of *Amrit*. Even the children of a Sikh have to accept *Amrit* to be a member of the Sikh Panth. Just by keeping long hair and tying turbans, as many followers of the Dera Jaimal Singh at Beas, Panjab do, one does not become a Sikh. Anyway the followers of the Dera claim themselves to be Radha Swamis and not Sikhs. A Sikh is not permitted to be a follower of that *dera* or get any guidance or advice from there.

A faithful will go only to a place of his/her faith and not to that of any other faith. For example, a Muslim will go to a mosque and a Christian to a church. They won't go to a temple or read *Vedas* for spiritual guidance. They may do so for their information and not as an act of faith. Similarly, a Sikh is permitted to go only to a Gurdwara and refer to *Gurbani* for spiritual guidance. A Sikh may, however, visit a place of any faith but is not allowed to believe in or follow the guidance given there to the members of that faith.

One cannot practice and believe in two faiths at the same time. **It is possible that one may pick up something from one faith and the other things from another faith which are acceptable to him. In that case one is not a believer or a follower of either of the two faiths. It is practicing according to one's convenience and not following any faith.**

(iii) During the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a holy man preached the Sikh faith and he often said:



"*Dhan Nirankar, Hor Sabha Khar*". It means "Glory to the formless God; except His followers, others are all lost." They were later called Nirankaris.

A splinter group of that organization gave up the teaching of the Sikh faith and started their own sect but continued to claim themselves to be Nirankaris. They, after the partition of the country in 1947, became popular with the support of the Congress Government. They even dared to fire at the Sikhs and kill 13 of them on the Vaisakhi Day of 1978 in Amritsar. They are labelled as Nakli (false) Nirankaris. Their "guru" keeps long hair and wears a turban like Sikhs, but he is not a Sikh. He has been successful in fooling the innocent Sikhs by his dress and by his singing of *Gurbani* hymns. No Sikh is permitted to have any dealings with him or with any member of their sect.

Everyday, new *sants* in Sikh appearance (usually white turban, robes and long hair) are increasing the number of such fake guides. Some claim to be something more than a Brahmngiani, adding 101, 108, 1001, 1008, titles to their name without knowing their meaning. When you are close to them, you will find most of them are suffering from greed. Their mission is to collect money from people for building their own personal empire and their ego.

*Gurbani* says:

ਲੋਭੀ ਕਾ ਵੇਸਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ਜੇ ਕਾ ਪਾਰਿ ਵਸਾਇ॥ Page 1417

Do not believe greedy persons. (Because all their tall claims are false.)

Of course, there are good *sants* and holy Sikhs who are doing great service in teaching *Gurmat* and *Gurbani* to the people. A true Sikh does not make false claims (as we often hear from money-hungry *sants*). He will endorse everything mentioned in *Gurbani* and will not start any group of his followers or have any name identifying his followers. In other words, he will not have a group of his own with one or another thing doing differently than what is practiced by the Sikh Panth.

(iv) Recently, some self-proclaimed preachers, to develop their own sect, have started saying (and even actually practicing) that not just the six prescribed *pauries*, but all of the *Anand* should be read at the end of the *Sikh Diwan*. **(Yogi Harbhajan Singh, who lead this thought, regretted it in 1995, and requested the Panth, in writing, to excuse him for this.)** Some have started worshipping Sri Guru Granth Sahib and pictures of the Gurus (the pictures are all false anyway) just as the Brahmans worship their idols. This is prohibited by the Sikh Panth. Such new “inventions” in the field of faith are fraught with danger. They are laying a foundation to split the Sikhs. All these people are supported by the opponents of Sikhs because it serves their purpose of weakening the Sikh community by dividing the Sikhs. Such impostors harm the Sikhs and corrupt the Sikh faith. With a very loud voice, they claim themselves to be *Brahmgyanis* and liberated *sants*. **A Sikh has to ignore them.**

They identify their followers by new names (not as Sikhs) assigned by them. If any person whether a Giani or *sant* makes Sikhs become his own disciples or identifies them as a distinct group, he is not a true Sikh. Such persons do not guide but misguide Sikhs to convert them into their own followers rather than letting them behave as members of the Panth.

Some of such *sants* or *gurus* evidently receive the support of the authorities to weaken the Sikh strength in India and elsewhere. They come up with a new nonSikh or antiSikh thought, present it as a Sikh principle and introduce it amongst the Sikhs to divide them. Their intention is to take over a section of the Sikh community by making them their followers. This is done to satisfy their ego of claiming to be "Master" or "Guru" and weaken the unity of the Sikh Panth.

**Groups like Kukas (Namdharis), Radhaswamis, and false Nirankaris all started as Sikh preachers but later turned openly against the Panth. They are cheating Sikhs by appearing like Sikhs with uncut hair, turbans, and by quoting *Gurbani* in their speeches.**

Similarly, there are many new *sants* who claim to be Sikhs but make their own disciples; they tell Sikhs their own *Reht* rather than advising them to follow the Panthic *Reht*. Recently, some *sants* have altered the structure of *Rehras* and modified Gurdwara protocol. Sikhs have to watch them, reject them and disassociate from them. Some naive Sikhs, particularly women, fall prey to them because of their fake and false promises of "saving" them here and in the next world.

It is well known that some impostors claimed themselves to be "*gurus*" and tried to establish their own sects, groups or religion even during the period of the Gurus. They all were excommunicated by the Gurus, even if they were their own sons or relatives. Khalsa Panth has to continue to adopt the same procedure to deal with such false *gurus*, *sants*, and preachers.

**5. Why do most temples celebrate only Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh's birthday and not of the rest of the Gurus. Are not they all equal?**

(i) Many Sikhs have a *wrong perception* that whenever we Sikhs have a *special gathering (Jor Mela)* we do so to celebrate the birth or demise or any other event in the life of a Guru. Actually these gatherings are held to preach *Gurmat* and not to celebrate any day or date in the life of a Guru.

Some days, whether related to the life of a Guru or not, were chosen as convenient and easy to remember by the people for annual gatherings of the Sikhs. These important functions are conducted on a large scale. They are used to preach the Sikh faith, remind them of their heritage, and to plan for the future of the community.

Let us look at the major days celebrated by the Sikhs.

**Vaisakhi and Diwali:** Sikhs during the 18th century got together (and they continue to do so even

today) twice a year on Vaisakhi and Diwali at Amritsar. These two days are not connected with Amritsar at all and neither are they connected with the birth or demise of any Guru. People celebrated these days even before the birth of Guru Nanak Dev. They were chosen by the Sikhs because they were well known and very popular throughout Panjab.

The Khalsa was founded on Vaisakhi Day at Anandpur not at Amritsar, where the gathering is actually held on that day. *However, the most important gathering at Anandpur is held not on Vaisakhi but on Hola Mahalla.*

**Hola Mahalla:** Hola, a spring festival, is celebrated at Anandpur, a few days before Vaisakhi. That day is not connected with any incident in the life of the tenth Guru or any other Guru. Celebration of this spring festival is an old custom and it started even long before the birth of Nanak. Being a common, well known day, Guru Gobind Singh fixed it as an annual sports and war games day for the Sikhs at Anandpur. Since then Sikhs continue to gather there for this function every year.

**Maghi:** This *Jor Mela* is held at Muktsar, the place of the final battle between Guru Gobind Singh and the ruling Mughal forces in May/June (*Jeth*) 1705. The winter month *Magh* (January), and not *Jeth*, the summer month, when the battle was actually fought at that place, was considered suitable for holding a function in this hot dry region of Malwa.

**Kartak PooranMasi:** The birth of Guru Nanak is celebrated in fall (Kartak, full moon) but he was born in Vaisakh (early summer). On that day, Sikhs used to gather there to preach *Gurmat*. This being the place of the birth of the Guru, the gathering there was wrongly assumed to be the celebration of the birthday of the Guru.

***From this we conclude that major Sikh gatherings, called Jor Melas, general meetings of the Panth, were held on days already popular with the people and not necessarily on the birthday or another day connected with the life of a Guru.***

This technique, choosing an already popular day for the celebration, has been also used by the Christians. Christ was born in August/September but Christians celebrate it on December 25. Even before the birth of Christ, this day was already a public festival day for celebrating the beginning of the new solar year. On this day, when the new solar year was considered to have started, the day length starts increasing from then on. (Actually the solstice falls on December 21/22.) Now, people often assume, of course, mistakenly that December 25 (Christmas) is the birthday of Christ.

Instead of calling a seasonal or an annual major function of the region a *Jor Mela*, as it was until recently, Sikhs now advertise it as celebration of the birth day or shaheedi (martyrdom) day of the Guru. This is a wrong approach to the Sikh gatherings. Sikhs hold their special congregation for community education and not to celebrate the birth or demise of

any Guru even though it may be held on such a day. Do the Sikhs distribute *ladoos* on the birthday or sit together sadly on the shaheedi days? Of course not. (*No wonder, in future the Sikhs may start doing that.*) Days are chosen for Panthic congregation and not to celebrate certain incidents in the life of the Gurus. Gurdwara functions are held, therefore, in the same way *Kirtan, katha, lecture, dhadhi var, etc.*, whatever the day, birthday or demise day.

***If the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev was celebrated during the Guru period, we would not be reading two dates (Kartak and Vaisakh) in Sikh literature telling about his birth.*** Similarly there would have been no second opinion about the dates of other major events.

The celebration of the birthdays of the Gurus is of recent origin during the British regime. There is no evidence in Sikh history that the birthdays of the Gurus were celebrated by the Gurus or by their disciples. No writer has mentioned the celebration of the birthday of Guru Nanak or the martyrdom day of Guru Teg Bahadur by Guru Gobind Singh or his own birthday by him.

**The correct answer to the above question is that regional gatherings and general gatherings (as explained above) are held on popular days convenient for Sikhs. These days are chosen for *Gurmat Parchar* and discussing the issues related to the Panth they were not to celebrate the birth or martyrdom of the Gurus.**

(ii) A wrong response to the above question (*Why do we celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh only, and not of other Gurus?*) was adopted by the Sikhs and they started holding functions on the birthdays of some other Gurus as well. When the logic was carried further another question, "Why are the birthdays of the Bhagats not celebrated by the Sikhs?" cropped up. Some Gurdwaras again responded wrongly by fixing special gatherings on the birthday of Bhagat Ravidas. Ravidasi Sikhs, as some Sikhs are mistakenly called now have started to celebrate the birthday of *guru* Ravidas in their own places. **This is surely a step in the wrong direction.** Some Sikhs have gone further on this path; they have started the celebrations of birthdays of Bhagats (gurus) Kabir, Namdev and other contributors to the holy scriptures. This will split Sikhs into different sections based on caste. Thus, they have started undoing what the Gurus did throughout their lives -- unite people into one brotherhood of equals believing in one scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. **Therefore, we must continue to hold regional and national gatherings on the chosen dates for preaching *Gurmat* but not label them as birthday or martyrdom day celebrations (even when gatherings are held on such dates).**

NOTE: *Sankrant, Pooran Masi, Amavas* and other such days were chosen for regular gathering of Sikhs. Unfortunately, now people believe them to be sacred days, an antiSikh belief. They were chosen just for convenience because these dates/days were easy to remember.



**6. We take out *Parsad* in the name of the *Panj Pyaras*. Similarly, why do we not take out *Parsad* in the name of the ten Gurus as well?**

The correct procedure for the distribution of the *Parsad* according to the *Gurmat* philosophy is given below. It will automatically explain why *Parsad* is not taken out for the ten Gurus.

At the conclusion of the Gurdwara function, the *Parsad* is first accepted into the *Guru Darbar* (*kirpan Bhet*) and then distributed according to the *Maryada*.

**(a) *Kirpan Bhet***

After the prayer and the recitation of the hymn (*Hukam*) from the *Guru Granth Sahib kirpan* is put into the *Parsad* before it is distributed to the *Sangat*. This is symbolic of the acceptance of the *Parsad* (which is offered by a Sikh or Sikhs) in the *Guru Darbar*. *Parsad* is accepted only after the recitation of the *Guru's* hymn. Hence, *kirpan Bhet* has to be done thereafter and not before. *kirpan* is not to be put into the *Parsad* halfway during the *Ardas* when the request is made for the acceptance of the *Parsad*. (This *Maryada* is the direction of the proper authority, *Akal Takhat*, and is not based on the personal opinion of the author. Hence, it has to be observed strictly.) *Ardas* should, therefore, be performed without making a Sikh to stand alert with a naked *kirpan* in his hand ready to put it in the *Parsad* when the *Granthi* mentions *Parsad* in his prayer.

**(b) Distribution of the *Parsad***

(i) According to the protocol, *Parsad* should first be given to the Guru and then to his minister, the person attending the Guru Granth Sahib. Later, it should be distributed to the *Sangat* without discrimination. As a result of not knowing this procedure, some omissions are being made in distribution of the *Prasad*.

Guru Gobind Singh passed on the guruship to the ever-alive Guru, *Panj Pyaras*, representing the Guru Khalsa Panth. The Guru, himself, became their first Sikh by accepting Amrit from them. *Panj Pyaras*, the five Singhs, represent the living and functioning Guru in the *Sangat*. The *Parsad* is, therefore, given first to the five Singhs in the *Sangat*. It is not given in the name of the first *Panj Pyaras* (chosen by Guru Govind Singh) hoping the *Parsad* will "reach" them. Because of this misunderstanding, the *Parsad* is sometimes given again to these five Singhs while distributing it to the *Sangat*. It is a wrong practice and is based on the ignorance of the Sikhs regarding the Sikh philosophy.

According to the *Maryada*, the *Panj Pyara Parsad* is not to be mixed back in the total *Parsad* but is to be distributed at random to the first five Singhs who are easily approachable. For this selection, it is not desirable to go to the end of the *Sangat* for giving *Panj Pyara Parsad* to a senior Giani Ji or some senior office bearer in the *Sangat*.

Every *Sangat* has the authority to choose their *Panj Pyaras* for any local purpose, for example, for

the Amrit ceremony, for the Sikh procession, for a foundation stone laying ceremony, for distribution of the *Parsad*. It must be mentioned here that the five Singhs chosen as the *Panj Pyaras* may not be the same every time. They are chosen from the Singhs available in the *Sangat* at that time and only for a specific purpose.

Giving *Parsad* to one Singh is no reflection on his greatness or the devotion of other Singhs in the *Sangat*. The selection of the *Panj Pyaras* for giving *Parsad* or for any function does not rate the chosen persons to be the topmost Sikhs in the *Sangat*. If it were so, the selection would raise a lot of unnecessary questions about the decision made. Further, there would be many objections to the choice whenever *Panj Pyaras* are chosen. The selection is done for a specific assignment only; thereafter, the five Singhs are again equal members of the Panth. There may be one group of five chosen Singhs for the Amrit ceremony and another group of five Singhs to lead the Khalsa procession.

(ii) After giving *Parsad* to the *Panj Pyaras*, it is offered to the minister (Granthi Sahib) of the Guru. As he is to attend the Guru Granth Sahib, *Parsad* is put in a bowl and placed near him. It is a totally wrong belief that the *Parsad* in the bowl is meant for the Guru. "Feeding" *Parsad* or *Langar* to the Guru Granth Sahib or pictures of the Gurus is strictly against the *Gurmat* philosophy. It is *Thakur Puja*, a pure Brahmanical ritual, which is prohibited to the Sikhs.

(iii) *Parsad* is later distributed to the *Sangat* equally and without discrimination. When a Sikh gets *Parsad* he bows to the Guru to thank him for this favour and then eats the *Parsad*.

(iv) The reader will have already understood the answer as to why *Parsad* is not given to the Gurus. To restate it, *Parsad* is not given in the name of the deceased *Panj Pyaras* who were chosen by the Guru on the day of Baisakhi in 1699. *Parsad* is given to the *Panj Pyaras* chosen for the purpose from the *Sangat* sitting in the Guru *Darbar* at that time. There is no question of giving *Parsad* to a person or persons (whether the *Panj Pyaras* chosen by the Guru or the Gurus themselves) who are no longer present in body form in the *Sangat* for receiving the *Parsad*. Offerings made in the name of deceased people do not benefit them and this practice was, therefore, prohibited by Guru Nanak.

NOTE: Incidentally it may also be mentioned here that it is wrong to bring *Langar* in a plate to the Guru *Darbar* for a *Bhog* ceremony as mentioned above. The Guru Granth does not eat anything. It is against the Sikh philosophy to put *kirpan* into the *Langar* (anyway you cannot do it. How will you do it to the chapatis or water which is yet to come out of the tap? Also, more *Langar* is being cooked while it is being served to the *Sangat*.)

What we ignore is that *Langar* already belongs to the Guru; it makes no sense to request the Guru to accept the *Langar*. *Parsad* is offered to the Guru *Darbar* by a Sikh or Sikhs; putting *kirpan* into it symbolises its acceptance by the Guru which is done after the recitation of the hymn. For the *Langar*, we merely do *Ardas*; we request the permission of the Guru for its distribution to the *Sangat* so they can partake of it.

**7. I have been an *Amritdhari* for the past 8 years, I do my *Banis* regularly, but the confusion I face is how am I going to be united with the Satguru?**

(i) You already have been graced by the Satguru. You have been bestowed with *Amrit*. When you read *Bani*, you actually are talking to the Guru. ***These Gurbani words were actually uttered by the Guru.***

Assume that Satguru is sitting before a blind man. Satguru is speaking and he is listening. Is not that man united with the Guru? Yes, he is communicating with the Guru but without seeing his body. Even when a person has eyes, communication is through words only. Guru is the sea of virtues and they are revealed through his words, not through the features of his face or weight and height of his physical body.

***Gurbani is Guru.*** When you read it, you directly listen to the Guru. You try to understand the meaning and directions of *Gurbani* and follow them to live your life. In case you need help to learn the interpretation of *Gurbani*, you may read any translation. The one by Prof. Sahib Singh, Guru Granth Darpan, is very suitable for a seeker as it logically explains *Gurbani* in simple routine language. The ninth volume has a special section to answer such questions as *Nam Japna*, Guru, God, and to understand their virtues. Also, if convenient you may consult some scholar for learning the meanings of *Gurbani*.

Some Sikhs say that translation and guides are only a help. When you listen to *Kirtan* attentively with

your mind fixed on the Almighty, many complicated philosophies become clear because you are tuned to the Guru and directly listening to him. The message is also revealed to the listener directly when one recites *Gurbani* with love and one's mind is drenched in the thought presented by the hymn.

(ii) **Sometimes the meanings of *Gurbani* hymns are distorted by opportunists to misguide the Sikhs.** For example:

ਦਰਸਨੁ ਭੇਟਤ ਪਾਪ ਸਭਿ ਨਾਸਹਿ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਦੇਇ ਮਿਲਾਈ॥ Page 915  
**Sight of the Guru** removes all sins and helps one to meet God.

ਦਰਸਨੁ ਭੇਟਤ ਹੋਤ ਪੁਨੀਤਾ ਪੁਨਰਪਿ ਗਰਭਿ ਨ ਪਾਵਨਾ॥ Page 1018  
**Sight of the Guru** saves one from the cycle of birth and death.

Fake gurus quote such hymns to say that one gets *mukti* by **seeing** the guru. It is a wrong interpretation of the above hymns. The meaning of "**seeing**" is not just looking at the guru, but **listening to the advice of the Guru and obeying it.**

The true meaning of the word ਦਰਸਨ is explained in another hymn.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨੋ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਵੇਖਦਾ ਜੇਤਾ ਜਗਤੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ॥ ਡਿਠੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜਿਚਰੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਨ ਕਰੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ॥ Page 594

The whole world looks at the true Guru. By just looking at the Guru, one does not qualify for Mukti; one achieves that status only by understanding and following the Word (message) of the Guru.

In our routine dialogue we use this phrase quite often. When we say, "I want to see you." It means that one wants to discuss some topic with the person

and not just to have a look at that person. Some self-made false "gurus" pick up such references (as mentioned above) from *Gurbani* and misguide naive people by distorting their meaning and message. They make their followers believe that they themselves are the Guru, (not the *Gurbani* which they quote) and their *darsan* will assure *mukti* to the disciple. This is a lie to attract followers and extract money from them.

If just looking at the face of the Guru could benefit a follower, then Prithi Chand and Ram Rai would not have gone astray. Being sons of the Guru, they watched the Guru every day, very closely and for many years. They enjoyed the lap of the Guru. However, despite the close "*darsans*" of the Guru, they committed intolerable acts and were eventually cast out of the Sikh faith by the Gurus. **How can a follower benefit from the "*darsans*" of a modern fake guru?**

## **8. What does Guru Granth Sahib tell about Yoga?**

Yoga is an independant faith and probably the oldest Indian faith. The mission of a yogi is to be a Sidh, one who has realized the ultimate and is able to perform miracles. Guru Nanak is said to have had two serious long discussions with them, one in the snowcovered peaks of Himalayas and the other in village Achal near Batala, Panjab.

Guru Nanak Dev has written *Sidh Gosht*, which is the summary of his spiritual dialogue with them. He criticised their practice of remaining *Jati*, celibate, and

claiming superiority over the family men. He did not agree with their philosophy or faith. He rejected them. There are four hymns in Jap Jee advising yogis to practice the right kind of life rather than believing in their rituals and miracles. He also said that yoga is not the right path for achieving the mission of human life and neither is the path of miracles (of which yogis are proud) the path of holy people.

ਆਪਿ ਨਾਥੁ ਨਾਥੀ ਸਭ ਜਾ ਕੀ ਰਿਧਿ ਸਿਧਿ ਅਵਰਾ ਸਾਦ॥ Page 6

Sikhs do not follow the path of any kind of yoga. Guru says listening to *Gurbani* is the true yoga.

ਕੁੰਡਲਨੀ ਸੁਰਤੀ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ॥ Page 1402

*Kundalni* gets awakened (the mission is achieved) by being in *Gurmat Sangat*.

### **9. In Christianity they say Jesus Christ is the only saviour. You say Guru Nanak is the only saviour. What is the difference?**

Let the readers first know what made a participant at the Sikh youth camp (Singapore, Samelan 1994) ask this question. A couple of Sikh youth during free time discussed with me how some youth born in Sikh families get misguided by Christian propaganda. Christian missionaries tell Sikhs that unless they believe in Jesus and become Christians they will go to Hell. They say that Christ died for sinners and took their sins upon himself. Christ is the only saviour; those, who believe in him, will be saved and others will suffer in Hell. The Sikh youth wanted the author to explain to the participants at the Samelan how Guru Nanak will save them if they practice the Sikh faith. Accordingly the message of Guru Nanak Dev, *living the Sewa-Simran life*, was explained.

Some opinions of Western scholars (see Question 1, Chapter II) were mentioned in the talk to explain the relevance of



the Sikh faith to the modern day life. In the end, it was concluded that Guru Nanak Dev, because of his message of one common God for whole humanity and equality of all people, is the saviour of all mankind and not just of the Sikhs:

The above question was asked at the end of that lecture.

To answer this question let me repeat the Christian statement told to the youth "Those who believe in Christ as the only Son of God who sacrificed his life for taking over the sins of the people, will be saved by him (Christ) and permitted entry into Heaven".

However, *Gurbani* says that nobody can claim a sole proprietorship on God, He is the common Father for all of us. A person can love Him by any Name, Ram, Allah, Guru or Gobind. **To be saved, one has to live a life free from vices.** Guru Nanak does not say "you believe in me and I will save you". Rather he says "one cannot be saved by anyone else. One has to *live* the right kind of life to be saved by the Lord".

ਜੇਹਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਸੋ ਲੁਣੈ, ਕਰਮਾ ਸੰਦੜਾ ਖੇੜੁ॥ Page 134

*Gurbani* gives guidance to overcome vices, and thus help one to save oneself from them. If by sacrificing one can take on himself the sins of the would-be followers, then Sikh Gurus are the most entitled holy persons to save people from Hell. Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh along with all his four sons and his mother sacrificed their lives for protecting the human rights of the poor and weak. Thousands of Sikhs gave their lives for the same cause.

Further, Sikhism rejects the existence of places called Hell and Heaven. It tells living the life of love for God and His people is living in Heaven. Forgetting God and suffering from vices is being in Hell while in this life, not after death.

**No prophet, Christ or any other holy man, can save anyone. One has to live a virtuous life to be saved, not just believe in one or another prophet. This is the message of Guru Nanak for the people all over the world.**

## Chapter VIII

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAISAKHI (VAISAKHI)

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Some important questions were asked after a lecture specially planned to be delivered in connection with the celebration of Baisakhi in the auditorium of P.U.B. Singapore. The answers to those questions, along with the lecture delivered on that occasion, are given below.

### **The Sikh Youth and Baisakhi**

Summary of the lecture given on 14 April 1996 to the youth in Singapore regarding the relevance of Baisakhi to their lives.

#### **References Quoted in the lecture:**

*(i) Mankind's religious future may be obscure, yet one thing can be foreseen. The living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in the days of ever increasing communications between all parts of the world and the branches of the human race. In this coming religious debate, the*

*Sikh religion and its scriptures, the Guru Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world.*

A British historian Toynbee, Foreword The Sacred Writing of the Sikhs Published by UNESCO.

(ii) *I have studied the scriptures of the great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes ... They speak to a person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.*

Miss Pearl S Buck, a Nobel Laureate, Introduction to the English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib.

(iii) The author of the "Vie de Jesus" was a great admirer of Jesus Christ. Greatly impressed as he was by the spiritual message delivered by Christ and those of the Semitic thinkers that preceded him, he posed the question "...whether great originality will rise again or will the world be content to follow the paths opened by the daring creators of the ancient ages?"

Having Sikhism in his mind, MacCauliffe in his book "The Sikh Religion", answers the above question in the following words:

*"Now here is presented a religion totally unaffected by Semitic or Christian influences. Based on the concept of the unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted an independent ethical system, ritual, and stan-*

*dards which were totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak's age and country. As we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system."*

The Sikh Faith A Universal Message Gurbakhsh Singh  
published by Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

### **Summary of the Speech:**

We are here to celebrate the founding of the Khalsa on the day of Baisakhi in 1699. It is my pleasure to share with you the significance of Baisakhi for the Sikhs, specifically the youth. Let us discuss the history of the faith and its uniqueness so that the youth know their heritage. This will help them to enjoy the self-esteem of being Sikhs instead of feeling embarrassed of their distinct identity granted to them on this day by Guru Gobind Singh.

### **A) Founding of the Faith**

Guru Nanak Dev, upon coming out of the river Bein, in 1499 delivered his first formal sermon, a message given to him by God; *"Na Koi Hindu Na Musalman"* *Do not divide humanity into Hindus and Muslims. We are children of the same Father, hence we are equal. We can love him by any Name; Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, etc.*

To understand this message, we must remember that people were divided not only into different religions but also into many castes and sub-castes,

some of them considered low or even untouchable. Followers of each faith claimed a franchise on God and preached that unless a person accepted their faith, he or she would not be permitted to enter into Heaven; one could enter it through their prophet only. Obviously this is an untenable belief which unfortunately prevails even today.

As a result, there prevailed serious interfaith and inter-caste hatred causing continuous tension among the people. Bhai Gurdas, the scribe of the Guru Granth Sahib, in his first Var, describes this irreligious and antisocial behavior of the people. He states in poetical language, that the "weight" of human conflicts became unbearable for Mother Earth. She requested God to send a prophet to stop the tension. God responded by sending Guru Nanak who preached Truth (i.e. all of humanity are His children and are equal.) See Chapter II Question 5, the translation of Var 1, Bhai Gurdas

**With this understanding, we can comprehend that when the Guru uttered, "*Na Koi Hindu Na Musalman*", he planted the seeds of a social and religious revolution.**

## **B) Nursing of the Faith**

The "plant", called the Sikh faith, was nursed by the ten Gurus with great devotion and many sacrifices, even at the cost of their heads. The faith of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of humanity was introduced through two Sikh institutions, namely *Sangat* and *Pangat*.

Everyone, including Hindus and Muslims, high caste and low caste, rich and poor, men and women were welcome to sit together as equals without any kind of discrimination. They were to love God by any and all Names Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, etc. This congregation was given the name *Sangat*. These people were also welcome to partake of free food, *Langar*, together as equals. It was called *Pangat*.

Later, during the times of the third and the fourth Gurus, the followers were required to use water from the same well and bathe in the same pool to abolish from their minds the feeling of "otherness" for persons of a different caste, community or faith. This was unimaginable during those days in India where some persons were considered untouchable and were not allowed to come close to a person of a higher caste.

The fifth Guru compiled the holy scripture. Not only the hymns of the Gurus but also hymns composed by Muslim, Hindu and many so-called low caste holy persons were included in it. They all preached that there is the same reflection of God in every human being. This message was not to the liking of the authorities or the people proud of their high caste. All Gurus were harassed by the misuse of political authority. The fifth Guru and the ninth Guru were arrested, tortured and murdered. The sixth and the tenth Gurus were repeatedly attacked by the army.

**In the face of this strong repression from the rulers and negative propaganda by the high caste, the Sikh wave continued to progress. It**

reached its climax on the day of Baisakhi in 1699. On this day, the Guru Khalsa Panth, the everliving Guru, was revealed and installed as *Panj Pyaras*.

### **C) Revelation of the Khalsa**

A special gathering of the Sikhs was called on this day. They were invited from all over India for this great occasion. In the general gathering, the Guru, with a glittering sword in his hand, gave a call for those who would protect the truth and live the faith at the cost of their lives. The devotees joined it in thousands. According to the intelligence report sent to the Emperor in Delhi, about 20,000 persons took Amrit and became members of the Khalsa Panth on that day. The first five who offered themselves to the Guru were called *Panj Pyaras*. They were requested by the Guru to admit him into the Panth by administering Amrit to him. *The Sangat founded by Guru Nanak was transformed into the Khalsa Panth on the day of Baisakhi, 1699.*

The mandate to the Khalsa is :

ਧਰਮ ਚਲਾਵਨ ਸੰਤ ਉਬਾਰਨ, ਦੁਸ਼ਟ ਸਭਨ ਕੇ ਮੂਲ ਉਪਾਰਨ॥

To spread the righteousness, protect the human rights of the truthful people (holy people) and destroy the tyrant.

Every disciple was required to wear the *five articles of faith*, called the five *Kakaars*, the identity and pride of a Sikh. To be a member of the Panth, one was also to follow the life of *Sewa-Simran* and wish well for all humanity.



**This revealed Guru, (the corporate body, the Guru Khalsa Panth) is beyond the danger of being “killed” by any king because it is not an individual human being but a philosophy, the fellowship of all those who promise to practice the Truth at any cost.** It is the installation of this Guru that we celebrate on this day of Baisakhi. Holding of high level functions all over the world, wherever the Sikhs are, remind us of this day.

The Sikhs under the guidance of this Guru, the Guru Khalsa Panth, continued their struggle for securing human rights for the weak. During the 18th century, becoming a Sikh was against the law of the land. The Delhi government ordered that anyone who could find a Sikh and chop off his head could exchange it at any police station for about one year's wages. Sikhs not only survived this elimination planned by the mighty Government, but before the turn of the century, became the formal rulers of the Panjab. Actually, their writ prevailed over major parts of the region during the latter half of the century. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, with the guidance and help of his mother-in-law, Sardarni Sada Kaur, coordinated the different units of the Panth (then called *Misls*.) He took over Lahore in 1799 and thus became the first Sikh ruler of the Panjab.

The reason for the success of the Khalsa was their love for humanity and the protection they provided to the poor and helpless at the cost of their own lives. The high character of the Sikhs was so popular with the people that even a Muslim historian, Kazi

Noor Mohammed, could not help recognizing it and recording it in his book.

Though he nursed an extreme hatred for the Sikhs and referred to them as *Sug* (dogs, in Persian) instead of Singh, he could not help admitting their high character. He writes:

*In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of women, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid servant. There is no adultery among these "dogs" nor are these mischievous people given to thieving. Whether a woman is young or old, they call her a "buriya" and ask her to get out of the way. (The word "buriya" in the Indian language means "an old lady".) There is no thief at all among these "dogs" nor is there any housebreaker born among these miscreants. They do not make friends with adulterers.* Jang Nama PP 156-159.

#### **D) Celebration of Baisakhi**

Now, a few words about how Baisakhi should be celebrated.

There is a very simple answer for this we know that the Guru founded the Khalsa Panth on this day by inviting the believers in equality of humanity to accept Amrit. Every disciple was welcome to become a member of the Akal Purkh Ki Fauj (saint-soldiers),

to protect and propagate this wave. The Guru himself underwent the ceremony, took Amrit and became the first member of this "army" of holy people. Therefore the true celebration of the day is that we ourselves take Amrit and join the Panth.

The rest of the activities planned for this day are also good and necessary. They bring a spirit of "*Chardi Kala*" to the Panth and remind them of their great heritage, inculcating self-esteem among the individuals. We have discussed the high esteem (because of their high character) in which the Sikhs were held by their opponents. It is this spirit that we should carry from the auditorium and spread among the Sikhs, particularly the youth. They need to learn about the features of their faith and the contributions of the Sikhs to society as observed by many modern nonSikh scholars. Further, when they hear about the actual experiences I have shared with you (summary of one incident given below) they will know the greatness of being born into a Sikh family and would love to live a Sikh way of life. This is the objective of celebrating Baisakhi by us.

Please excuse me if I have made any omissions or statements which do not agree with the principles of *Gurmat*.

*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*

Gurbakhsh Singh

**Speaker's personal experience in the USA**

A couple of years ago, I attended an interfaith meeting in Cleveland, Ohio. There were about a dozen speakers representing different faiths. Each described the features of his faith. At the end a common question was asked of all the speakers, **“How do you regard the people who do not belong to your faith? Are they lost?”**

As it is well known, preachers of each faith insist that unless one joins **their** faith, one cannot be saved (or one will not find entry into Heaven). The question was obviously a very unpleasant one to be asked in that kind of a forum. Every speaker's dilemma was obvious as they spoke. The last turn was that of the Sikh speaker so I went to the podium and answered the question like this.

“Friends, this question does not exist for the Sikhs. Guru Nanak founded the faith by preaching that we should not divide people into Hindus, Muslims or into any other faith. We are children of the same Father whom we can love by any Name; Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, Niranjana (a word used by Yogis for God). **Anyone, who loves God by any Name, realizes Him.** The Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, contains the hymns of six Sikh Gurus and thirty other holy people who were born as Muslims, Hindus, low castes and even untouchables. They addressed God by many Names in their hymns, including those five mentioned above.

*Gurbani* says no one can claim a franchise on God, He is our common Father.

ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ ॥ Page 658

God is nobody's father's property. He is owned by love.

ਤੂੰ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥ Page 97

Lord, you are the Father to all of us.

I concluded my reply saying, *“God is our common father; therefore people of all faiths have equal rights on Him. He loves all of us. Anyone who loves Him and His ‘children’ can realize Him.”*

A spontaneous loud clapping from the audience welcomed this reply, and I was very pleased with this response. However, the climax was yet to come.

A supplementary question was asked by the same person, **“How do you regard those who do not believe in God?”**

Briefly, my reply was like this: I can answer the question better with an actual example from my life. My son in India feels that I do not exist (for him) because he cannot meet me or contact me. My daughter here in the USA, in whose house I stay, even though aware of his feelings for me, still loves him. She knows that to deserve my love she cannot afford to ignore him. Further, it is very clear in her mind that he, being my son, is to be treated and sincerely loved by her as a brother. Similarly, we Sikhs know that all people, whether they love God or not, are like brothers to us. Our prayer, therefore, is considered com-

plete only when we say, **“Father, we pray that You may bless the whole of humanity in Thy Name”**.

*Hearing this, the whole house (people of different faiths) stood on their feet and clapped loudly till I returned to my seat. The Sikh youth and also the adults who attended that interfaith meeting felt great and enjoyed the self-esteem of being Sikhs.*

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

Many questions were asked at the end of the lecture but most of them have already been answered in the book. The answers to two pertinent questions are given below.

***Question A: I have read the Christian Bible and have found that so many teachings of Jesus are similar to that in the Guru Granth Sahib. So, is Christianity a “partner” religion with Sikhism since both speak the same message? If so, why is there so much friction between our faiths?***

Religion is known not from the moral code but from the philosophy of the faith regarding the definition of God and the mission of human life prescribed by it.

All religions, not just Christianity, tell their followers to speak the truth, live honestly, donate money to the poor and sympathize with the sick and needy. Similarly, all religions prohibit actions that are immoral and not accepted socially. For example, every faith

disallows robbery, dishonest earnings, violence, cheating, bribery, adultery, lying, mistreating the weak, being greedy, egoistic, etc. They are to be avoided as they are sins. In short, with just minor variations, all religions actually preach the same moral and ethical code.

*However, this similarity in religions should not lead one to believe that all religions are the same; they may be totally different depending upon the concept of God and the mission of human life preached by them.*

**(i) Concept of God:** The uniqueness of a faith lies in the concept of God and the authority of the prophet preached by the faith. Most people claim that only the Name given to God by **their** prophet is sacred and that only those people who believe in **him** and join **their** faith will be saved.

Christianity is no exception. It says Christ is the **ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD** and the **ONLY SAVIOUR** of mankind. Those alone who believe in Christ will be saved. According to Christians, non-Christians are non-believers and will not be saved. Here lies the difficulty of accepting the Bible as a "partner" religion with the Sikh faith.

Guru Nanak Dev rejected this belief. He said that everybody, no matter what faith one belongs to, is God's child. God is the Father and the Mother of all mankind. Hence, all human beings are equal in His Eyes and they may love Him/Her by any Name; Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, etc. No one Name is superior or inferior to the other.

Further, Guru Nanak cautioned people that neither any prophet nor he can save a person. People have to act righteously to be saved by the Lord Himself and not by the prophet. God judges us not by the Name with which we address Him but by our sincerity and love for Him.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ ॥ Guru Nanak

Those who remember God succeed in their efforts (to realize Him.)

ਜਿਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੀਓ ਤਿਨਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਪਾਇਓ ॥ Guru Gobind Singh

Those who Love God realize Him.

The Sikh holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, contains the writings of about three dozen holy persons who realized the Truth. They include among them low castes, untouchables, Muslims, Hindus and six Sikh Gurus.

**(ii) Mission of Human Life:** The goal of human life and what happens after death are other aspects which give distinction to a faith. All people of different faiths are scared of Hell and, therefore, keep a strong belief in their prophet to assure their entry into paradise.

Guru Nanak rejected this belief also. He denied the existence of places assumed to be Heaven or Hell. He said that loving God and singing His virtues is enjoying the bliss of the heavens here on this very earth. On the other hand, suffering from ego, lust, anger, greed and other vices is undergoing the tortures of Hell in this very life.



Thus, the Sikh faith as stated in my lecture and as observed by MacCauliffe in his book, is unique and independent of the religious beliefs of the East and the West. It is the faith for the modern man and for all of humanity. The reader is requested to study the three quotations given in the beginning of this lecture to understand the great message of the Sikh faith.

See also Chapter VII Question 1.

***Question B: An increasing number of Sikhs feel that Guru Nanak's teachings should be adopted as they deal with peace. Guru Gobind Singh has portrayed the teachings of violence and not peace.***

***How are we to convince these Sikhs that there is no difference in both the teachings?***

Yes, I agree with you. The misunderstanding that Guru Gobind Singh changed Guru Nanak's path of peace to the path of sword is common among some Sikhs and many non-Sikhs. It started with a couple of non-Sikh scholars who read the Sikh history without studying the principles of the Sikh faith. These writers did not study the hymns of Guru Nanak Dev and were not clear about the mission of the Guru. They were, therefore, responsible for creating incorrect opinions about the Sikh faith. Let us analyze the whole issue from the aspect of *Gurmat* philosophy and Sikh history.

***Gurmat Philosophy***

Here is the path laid by Guru Nanak in his own words:

ਜਦੁ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮੁ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥

ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਪੈਰੁ ਧਰੀਜੈ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੧੪੧੨)

The Guru desires of a Sikh: If you love me, cut off your head, put it in your palm and follow me. Do not hesitate a bit but offer your head and adopt the path.

The message is that the life of a Sikh is a life of sacrifice.

The path of Guru Nanak is a path of ਸਰਬਤ ਕਾ ਭਲਾ (Welfare for ALL). Therefore, the Guru stood up to stop injustice to the poor and common people. The rulers, the administrators and the guides of different faiths were all sucking the blood of the common man. Guru Nanak boldly exposed them in harsh words:

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ ॥ Page 1288

Rulers and administrators behave like bloodsuckers, the beasts.

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ ॥

ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ ॥ Page 662

The judges, the Brahmans and the yogis are all sucking the blood of the people; all three are fooling them and are responsible for their problems.

ਖੜੀਆ ਤ ਧਰਮੁ ਛੋਡਿਆ ਮਲੇਛ ਭਾਖਿਆ ਗਹੀ ॥

ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸਭ ਇਕ ਵਰਨ ਹੋਈ ਧਰਮ ਕੀ ਗਤਿ ਰਹੀ ॥ Page 663

The warrior class (Khatri) have given up their faith, the responsibility of protecting the weak; they please the rulers.

Thus, it is Guru Nanak Dev himself who started this CONFRONTATION with the tyrannical and unjust

authorities, whether political or religious. Through his preaching the Guru initiated the struggle for the human rights of the weak and the poor. He knew well that ultimately violence would be used against those who followed this mission to help the weak. Accordingly, he cautioned: "Anyone who decides to adopt this path should be willing to make the greatest sacrifice and offer his head for this cause"

The call given by Guru Nanak was repeated by Guru Gobind Singh (then Guru Gobind Rai) about two centuries later. He announced to the huge gathering of people specially invited from all over India, "I want a Sikh to offer his head for protecting the righteousness, Dharma." Thus there was no difference at all between the messages or the directions given by the first Guru and those given by the tenth Guru to the Sikhs.

The first five volunteers who offered their heads to the tenth Guru were given Amrit, named *Panj Pyaras* and the Guruship bestowed on them. They were, therefore, called Guru Khalsa Panth. Guru Gobind Rai himself took Amrit from this Guru Panth and became their first disciple. Along with this Guruship, the mandate given to the Khalsa was:

ਧਰਮ ਚਲਾਵਨ ਸੰਤ ਉਬਾਰਨ, ਦੁਸ਼ਟ ਸਭਨ ਕੋ ਮੂਲ ਉਪਾਰਨ॥

To spread righteousness, protect the human rights of the truthful people (holy people, followers of truth) and destroy the tyrant.

It is the same mission that was laid down by Guru Nanak Dev for a person to become a Sikh, a life

of sacrifice for truth. **We see no difference in this path and the path laid down by Guru Nanak.**

### **Historical Perspective:**

The people in power, whether in the field of faith or politics, were upset because they were exposed by the Gurus. They did whatever they could, including the use of violence, against the unarmed Gurus. To understand this we must refer to some happenings in Sikh history.

(i) A complaint was lodged at Lahore by a high caste person, called Tapa, against Guru Amar Das. He protested against the Guru for letting low caste and untouchables take water from the Baoli (an open well with steps reaching the water level) and eat food in *Langar* as equals along with the high castes. This is against the principle of the caste system of the Hindu faith. The Guru was summoned to explain his actions in the court of the Emperor Akbar, then in Lahore. After listening to Bhai Jetha Ji, (later the fourth Guru), who represented Guru Amar Das at the court, the Emperor dismissed the case.

(ii) After two unsuccessful army attacks (mentioned in *Guru Granth Sahib* ਪ੍ਰਥਮੇ ਮਤਾ ਜਿ ਪੜੀ page 371, ਸੁਲਹੀ ਤੇ ਨਾਰਾਇਣ ਰਾਖੁ page 825) failed to dislodge or kill the fifth Nanak, Guru Arjun Dev, he was arrested without any reason. Of course, a false excuse of helping Khusro, the rebel son of the emperor Jahangir, was made. The Guru was tortured and finally murdered.

(iii) The sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind, was arrested. Keeping in view the protests of the people, he was released to soothe the feelings of the masses. But some years later, he too was attacked by the army.

Therefore, to protect the wave for justice and righteousness, the sword (*kirpan*) had to be taken up by Guru Hargobind. (*Guru Gobind Singh was not the first to do it.*) This was done by him under the directions of his father, the fifth Guru and according to the principles of *Gurmat* laid down by Guru Nanak.

In view of the two armed attacks on him, Guru Arjun Dev arranged for the defense training for his son, Hargobind. Before being martyred, the Guru advised his son to assume the responsibility of the Guruship by wearing two swords, representing spiritual leadership (*Piri*) and temporal leadership (*Miri*). Thus, the sword was taken up to stop the tyranny and provide peace to the people. It was done only when offering of the head by the Guru failed to change the mind of the tyrant. As the sword was taken up for protection of the helpless, its name was changed from *talwar* (a weapon for attack) to *kirpan* (a weapon for defense).

Once the author was asked to discuss the Sikh faith in a meeting conducted by the Committee for Racial Justice at the Gurdwara, Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver. People of all faiths including judges, police officers and other government officials were present. I explained to them that a Sikh is hurt when somebody asks, "Why are you carrying this dagger?" I told them,

"Firstly, it is not a dagger, it's a *kirpan*. Secondly, a Sikh does not carry it, he *wears* it. Only robbers *carry daggers*."

Referring to the change of the name of *talwar* to *kirpan*, I suggested to the police chief present in the meeting to change the name of the pistol worn by the policeman to "*protecta*" so that it reveals its purpose, to protect people. Everyone present was fascinated by the suggestion. The police chief later observed that he understood why it was justified for a Sikh to *wear a kirpan*.

(iv) Violence against the Gurus continued. The four army attacks on the sixth Guru, the summoning of the seventh and the eighth Gurus to Delhi by the emperor to submit to his authority and the murder of the ninth Guru are all well known incidents of Sikh history.

*A regular and disciplined organization was needed to fight this tyranny intended to destroy the protectors of human rights. Guru Gobind Singh undertook this great responsibility. Of course, he had to sacrifice his whole family for following this path.*

The Guru Khalsa Panth did its duty so well that the tyrannical rule was uprooted and a rule of *justice for all people* was established in 1799 (100 years after the Khalsa Baisakhi) in Lahore.

The character of the Sikhs, the saint-soldiers, as described by a Muslim historian and mentioned to you during the lecture (the reader may see it again to understand the significance of the *kirpan* in the hands of the Sikhs) was responsible for the success of the Khalsa. This should dispel the misinformation spread by ignorant writers regarding the Sikh character. **Rather, it proves that the Sikhs were neither given nor did they use their weapons for violence. They used**

**them for maintaining peace and protecting human rights of the people.**

*I must mention one of the many incidents of Sikh history that explains the above view of the Muslim historian.*

Ahmed Shah Abdali repeatedly invaded India, and almost every year took with him the wealth and women from Delhi and surrounding area. The women were sold in his country for a coin. The Sikhs salvaged the honor of the country by attacking his caravan and getting back as many women as possible, from him.

In 1761 about 2,000 helpless young women were picked up by Abdali. The Sikhs very well knew that the prisoners were the daughters of the rulers and administrators of Delhi who had fixed a price on the head of a Sikh.

The cries of these helpless young women prisoners reached the Khalsa staying in the deserts. The only way they could help the distressed women was to come out from their hideouts, unsheathe their swords and challenge the soldiers to release the innocent women. The Khalsa did it; of course, at the cost of many Sikh lives. Thus, they lived up to the principle of their faith (ਸਰਬਤ ਕਾ ਭਲਾ, Welfare for ALL) laid down for the Sikhs by Guru Nanak Dev.

The women, who were escorted safely back to their parents, molded the minds of many Muslims and Hindus. They felt that, if one is to live a life of self respect and honor, one should live like a Sikh and die

like a Sikh. This thought made many of them join the Sikh Panth.

The very next year in February 1762, Abdali angered by his defeat at the hands of the Sikhs, returned with a big cavalry force to take revenge on them. He traveled very fast and took Sikhs unaware near Barnala, in the Malwa region of the Panjab. The Sikhs, along with their children and old people, were moving to the south towards the deserts and were in a highly vulnerable position. Half of the nation (estimates vary, out of 40 to 60 thousand Sikhs about 20 to 30 thousand Sikhs) was murdered by the army. Thinking that he had 'destroyed' the Sikhs, Abdali went to Amritsar and blasted the Harimandar Sahib, the Golden Temple. It was filled with debris and dead animals to desecrate the holy place which gave life to the Sikhs. The fear of the Sikhs, however, continued to haunt Abdali. *For saving the honor of the young daughters of their enemies, the Sikhs sacrificed half of their nation and risked the destruction of their holy place.*

That same year in September, when Abdali was still near Lahore, the Sikhs challenged him. To save his life, he had to escape from the battlefield, under cover of darkness. Later, Abdali, finding the Sikhs too strong, feared entering into Panjab and died in Kabul, repenting his defeat at the hands of the Khalsa, whom he wanted to subdue or destroy.

The history of 1699-1799, the period of the Guru Khalsa Panth, proves that the *kirpan* (mistakenly called sword) was used as a weapon for defense, the way a policeman uses his gun to fight



robbers and criminals. This is because the Khalsa was organized as Akal Purkh Ki Fauj, each member being a *Sant-Sipahi* (a holy policeman).

Thus, **the statement that "Guru Gobind Singh started a violent path instead of the path of peace founded by Guru Nanak Dev" is totally wrong.** It is based on mere ignorance of the writers regarding the philosophy and history of the Sikhs.

This discussion should convince all those present here in the auditorium that the *kirpan* was bestowed to the Khalsa and it was actually used to provide peace to the people. The use of the *kirpan*, thus, protected the weak from the state tyranny, a mission assigned to the Sikhs by Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

(This lecture was first typed and edited by Sardarni Patwinder Kaur Singapore. Later it was revised for including in the book.)